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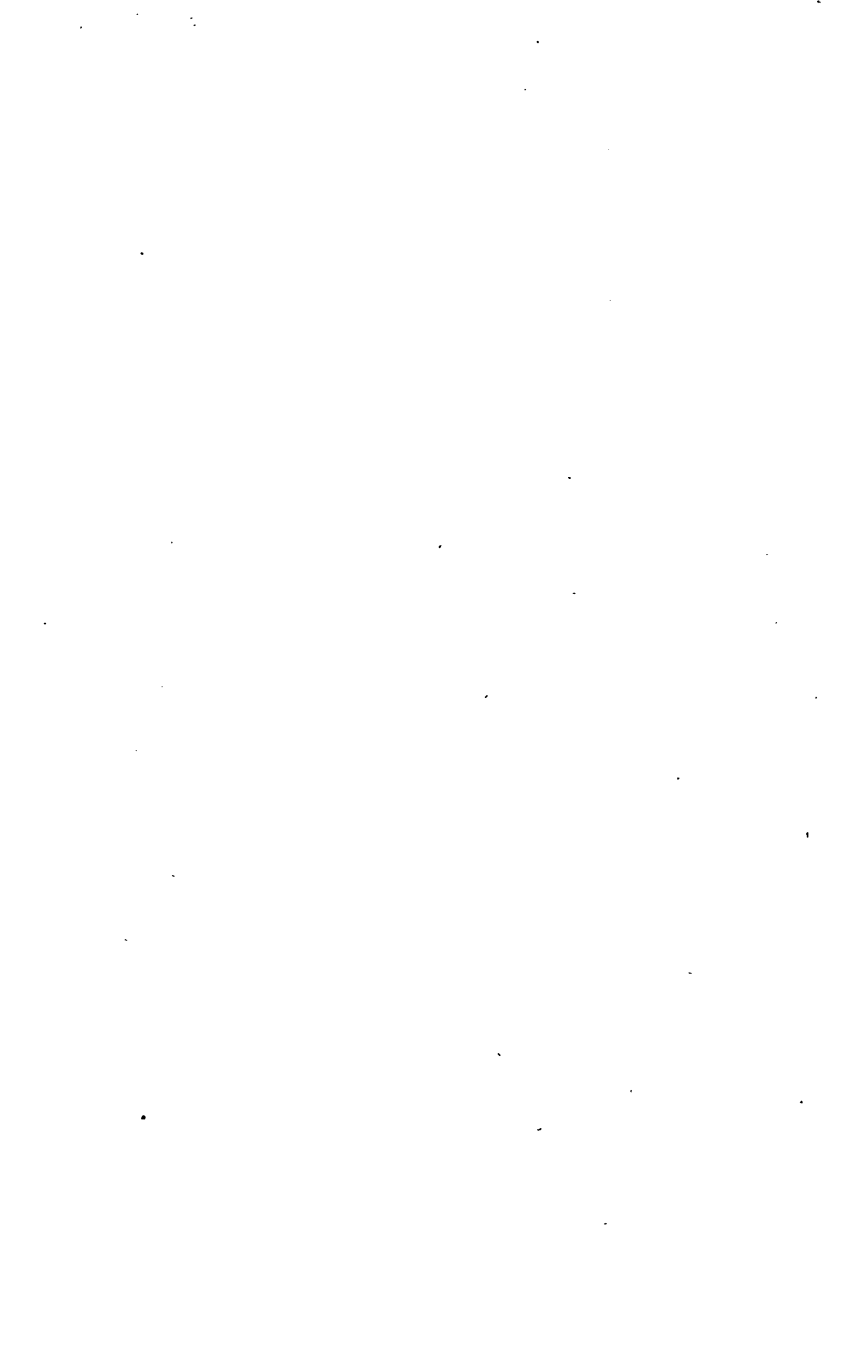
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WHILE THE WHEEL SPINS BRAVELY, THE FLAX WEARS







DREAM FACES



D R E A M F A C E S

BY

HON. MRS. FETHERSTONHAUGH

AUTHOR OF

KILCORRAN, 'ROBIN ADAIR,' ETC.

'While the wheel spins bravely, the flax wears fast'



VOL. I.

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CHAPTER I.

A DREAM OF THE 'NORTH COUNTRIE.'

VOL. I.

I

‘It was an English ladye bright,
 (The sun shines fair on Carlisle wall,)
And she would marry a Scottish knight,
 For Love will still be lord of all.

‘Blithely they saw the rising sun,
 When he shone fair on Carlisle wall ;
But they were sad ere day was done,
 Though Love was still the lord of all.’

ALBERT GRÆME.

CHAPTER I.

WILD winds whistling o'er the heather-covered mountains,—wilder rain falling in torrents mingled with sleet and snow,—wildest of all, Carra Force roaring down its rocky bed as only a turbulent mountain stream can roar.

It was a dark evening enough, and the desolate expanse of mountain and moor on every side was wrapt in thick, driving mist and rain. Not a gleam from sun, moon, or stars shone upon the earth, a great darkness covered all, and no sound could be heard save the roar of the river,—

as, goaded to madness by the sharp rocks which enclosed its spirit on either side, it flung itself over the opposing ledge and fell crashing and foaming on to the still more cruel rocks below, scattering its foam and spray high in the air in despairing deprecation as it hurried onward and ever onward to the far North Sea.

Not a pleasant evening at all, on the whole, and quite the last to choose upon which to meet with an accident, even should the latter be of a trifling description,—such as had just occurred to an unwary Southern sportsman whilst seeking vainly to find some means of crossing the turbulent stream aforementioned. One slip on the slimy, green-tinted rocks which bound its restless waters into some sort of straight and narrow way,—one

desperate effort to save a favourite gun from utter annihilation on the said rocks, —and Sir Horace Stuart, Bart., of Heron's Chase, County Fenshire, found himself suddenly lying prone upon his face, with one ankle very badly sprained, if nothing worse.

For some moments he lay still, almost fainting from the effects of the unbearable pain ; and then the exceeding gravity of his unpleasant situation struck him with full force, as an irritable curse and a hearty groan accompanied each fresh effort to raise himself on to his legs again, only to fall back more helplessly than before.

Nor did the two or three loud shouts which he gave, in vain hope of attracting the attention of some belated shepherd, seem of any avail, for the roaring of Carra

Force drowned all other sounds in its own fierce voice.

‘Is it possible that there is not a living soul near this God-forsaken spot?’ exclaimed the sufferer angrily at last. ‘What a double-distilled fool I was to go after that wary and wounded old cock grouse, instead of going straight back with the keepers! Well, it’s no use lying here and cursing my luck, for they’ll never come back to look for me, trust them! Once they get their knees to mine host of the “Welcome’s” blazing fire, and their lips to his fiery grog,—it’s little they’ll think of *me*, and care whether I ever get back to that confounded hostelry again or not. This cursed river, too, gives one no chance of making one’s self heard, though I’ll have one more try—— ah!

what's that? A *petticoat!*' and Sir Horace's rather small and colourless gray eyes lit up with a sudden gleam in the darkness, like that of a cat who hears the scratching of its legitimate prey, the mouse.

'I heard some one calling, and I would fain give help!' said a clear, frank musical voice close to the prostrate hero, and, from the slight hesitation in the speaker's words, it was evident that she was in some doubt as to what sort of help to give.

It was too dark to see more than a light dress drenched with rain, a gray shawl enveloping both head and shoulders, and a woman's hand stretched out to help him rise,—as in a very few sentences Sir Horace Stuart explained the position of

affairs, and gave a brief summary of his accident.

Not to take a woman's hand when offered to him was certainly no part of Sir Horace's creed, but in truth it took a good pull and a strong pull to get him once more on to his legs, or rather his leg, for one of those members persistently declined to make itself of use in supporting his body, and had it not been for the strong young arm of his unknown saviour he would more than once have fallen.

'I'll take you straight to my father's house, it's no great way,' said the damsel encouragingly; the slight north-country accent and clear ringing voice sounding very fresh and fascinating to an ear accustomed to more artificial tones.

'I fear I shall never get back to the

village where I am staying, to-night,' said Sir Horace, as he dragged himself painfully along a rough unbeaten path, leading apparently to nowhere.

'Of course not. It's little likely we'd let you. You'll be the gentleman from the south that is staying at Willie Dixon's (the "Welcome" they call his place), isn't it so?'

There was no vulgar curiosity in the tone, simply a frank attempt to make him feel at his ease, and ready to accept any small kindness or hospitality offered to him as to a friend and not a stranger.

'Yes. I came there two days ago, to shoot over this outlying part of my cousin Cameron Stuart's moor, but it's so rough a place that I meant to be off for good early to-morrow morning,' said Horace

Stuart with an indignant shudder, as he recalled to mind the dingy best bedroom and roughly-sanded parlour of that gruesome 'Welcome.'

'Well, you'll have to make the best of *our* rough place now,' laughed his fair conductor in answer, 'for it's little likely you'll care to tramp the long four miles that lie betwixt here and the "Welcome" for many a day yet, or to ride in our cart either. We'll send for your baggage to-night though, if you please, for you're just all of a soak and drip, and father's clothes will be an ill fit on you, I'm thinking!'

The sensitive Sir Horace gave a little shiver of dismay at the thought of this new dilemma awaiting him. It was very uncomfortable certainly to feel a separate rill running into each coat sleeve and down

the back of his neck, not to say a general adhesion of all his clothes to whichever portion of the human frame they covered ; but still, who might this damsel's father be, and what might his clothes be like ? They might be old and dirty, they might smell of peat or whisky, they might smell of—— Good heavens ! what a situation to be placed in ! And Sir Horace's equanimity, which had borne up against all weariness and pain, fairly gave way before the dread of any shock to his aristocratic and sensitive nose.

But the unquestionable refinement of his present companion's voice and manner, in spite of a very slight accent in the one, and a certain brusque shyness in the other, —reassured him somewhat as to the probable condition of her relatives, and so he

limped along with a tolerable amount of gratitude in his heart, remembering that were it not for the timely aid which had been vouchsafed to him, he would assuredly have been in a very sore plight indeed.

‘We’re nearing home now,’ said his guide cheerfully, as she felt him dragging heavier and heavier on her arm, and an occasional stagger, or involuntary groan of pain, betrayed the severity of the exertion.

Sure enough, there rose up suddenly before them out of the darkness a gray blank wall with battlemented top, finishing in a dark old dreary tower,—one of the many ‘border keeps’ still left to mark where once lay the Debatable Land, and bringing to mind mutual wild forays and raids, and lifting of cattle on either side, to be avenged with bloodthirsty vindictiveness whenso-

ever the chances of war should turn again, and the despoiler become the despoiled.

Opening a narrow postern door which the fast gathering darkness rendered almost invisible to stranger eyes, Sir Horace's companion helped him carefully across a stone-flagged yard whereon a blaze of ruddy fire-light was cheerfully streaming, and throwing open another oaken door larger than the first, ushered him into a long low room, at the farther end of which an enormous wood fire was roaring up the open chimney.

Thankfully did Sir Horace Stuart sink into a large arm-chair placed close before it, and with closed eyes he lay for many minutes unconscious to almost everything around him, for pain and exhaustion had done their work at last.

CHAPTER II.

THE FACE OF A NEW LOVE.

‘ The new wine, the new wine,
 It tasteth like the old,
The heart is all athirst again,
 The drops are all of gold ;
We thought the cup was broken,
 And we thought the tale was told,
But the new wine, the new wine,
 It tasteth like the old !

‘ The earth had grown so dreary,
 The sky so dull and gray ;
One was weeping in the darkness,
 One was sorrowing through the day :
But a light from heaven gleams again,
 On water, wood, and wold,
And the new wine, the new wine,
 It tasteth like the old !’

IMBUTA.

CHAPTER II.

‘ You must drink a few spoonfuls of this hot soup,’ said a courteous quiet voice in Sir Horace’s ear, as the latter opened his eyes with a start, and strove to rise. ‘ No, no, lie still where you are, my man and myself will do everything for you, if you will allow us!’

Intense astonishment was the prevailing feature in Horace Stuart’s mind, as, instead of the roughly-clad keeper or shepherd whom he had fully expected to see, he found his host standing before him in the guise of an elderly divine, dressed

with scrupulous neatness, though his black coat was worn very threadbare here and there, and many a careful darn made itself conspicuous on his spotless linen. A feeling of relief came over Sir Horace at once. Here, at least, was a man whose clothes he might wear with confidence, and he accepted gratefully the old clergyman's offer of dry things to replace his own dripping wet ones.

‘By the morning your own luggage will be here, sir,’ said the old man courteously, ‘if you will kindly tell me in whose name it shall be claimed?’

Horace Stuart gave his name and address, and learnt in return that of his host,—the Rev. Cyril Græme. And by the time the latter had found him a suit of clothes,—culminating in a somewhat

strangely-shaped black velvet jacket which was apologetically described by the old gentleman as 'my painting coat, sir,'—the two men had become quite conversational; for rest was gradually lessening the acute pain which Sir Horace had suffered from his sprained ankle.

'You are an artist, Mr. Græme, I presume?' he inquired with ready tact, and the elated look on his host's face showed him that he had made a successful remark.

'Well, I mus'n't say that,—no, certainly I am not that, Sir Horace, but I *work* at painting all day long from dawn to sunset.' And the old man rubbed his long thin white hands together in glee as he spoke of his favourite subject.

Horace Stuart glanced round the room curiously. It was long and low, as has

been said, with dark wainscoted walls and a ceiling made of solid oak, matching the floor beneath. The great, wide, open fireplace occupied the whole of one end of the room, whereas the door, and an immense cupboard of carved black oak, took possession of the other; whilst on the courtyard side three high narrow windows showed themselves—latticed in iron and cased in stone—of a strength to which the roaring tempest hurled against them seemed but as a summer breeze.

‘Quaint,’ thought Sir Horace to himself, as his eyes wandered from the endless vista of ceiling, walls, floor, and furniture, all in black oak, to a very modern china jar on the little table beside him, which was filled with foxglove and heather, evidently the work of a woman’s hand. ‘I

wonder who these people are, and why they are here? That must have been the old man's niece or daughter who came to my rescue this evening; but, strange to say, the next generation spoke with a decided accent, and yet this old man does not. Can't make him out at all. What a clergyman and an artist is doing on the top of these mountains I can't tell. And yet he looks a real old gentleman, too. I shouldn't care to try and pump him too much. Aha! here comes the fair lady again!

‘My daughter, Elsie Græme,’ said the man simply, by way of introduction; and, turning to the new comer, he made equally brief mention of the name of their guest, and each looked curiously at the other, now that they met once more in the blaze of a full light.

Elsie's frank glance quickly took in a fair quiet face half hidden by a close-cut 'Henri Quatre' beard, which concealed a somewhat cold and thin-lipped mouth; clear-cut and aristocratic features, almost spoilt by the expressionless shape and colour of a pair of cold light eyes above them; a slight spare figure, rather below the medium height, and an easy, graceful manner, which gave at once a great charm to its fortunate possessor.

Sir Horace, on his side, let his eyes rove slowly and attentively, with the air of a thorough connoisseur in female beauty, over the tall, lithe figure which stood before him,—noting gravely each good or bad point as it became revealed in turn, and making special mention in his mind of a wealth of sunny chestnut hair, wide open

hazel-gray eyes of strangely beautiful expression, and smaller hands and feet than, on the whole, he would have expected.

But careful and exhaustive as was his scrutiny of his late companion, Horace Stuart failed to notice the chief distinguishing trait in her beauty, and one which gave the whole keynote to the character of Elsie Græme. It lay in a certain proud, wild freedom of heart and soul, which shone out equally in her clear brave eyes; a look which one associated strangely with grand purple mountains and heather breezes keen as snow; and as she spoke, her clear ringing tones sounded to a fanciful ear almost like the far-off voice of Carra Force softly calling.

With such a nature as Elsie Græme's, it were easy to associate frank outspoken

anger, passionate regret, or bitter remorse; but the thought of anything contemptible, cowardly, or selfish had no place there. Want of softness there might be in such a character as hers,—want of faith and of truth, never. She seemed the very embodiment of a strong clear mountain stream,—resolute and unchanging in its ever onward course, deep and true as death.

Sir Horace Stuart roused himself at length from his rather too prolonged scrutiny, and made profuse apologies for his inability to rise, which Elsie cut somewhat brusquely short, and pulling a low chair towards the fire-place, she seated herself opposite their visitor, with the evident intention of solemnly assisting her father to entertain him.

This was not at all satisfactory to Sir Horace, however, who, now that he had been dried, warmed, and nourished, was rapidly returning to his normal frame of mind ; and an angry ‘Two’s company, three’s none,—I wish that old man would go!’ was muttered into his soft and silky beard with angry emphasis.

But though the said ‘old man’ had not the faintest intention of going away, he did the next best thing to taking himself off, by placidly going to sleep in course of time ; though not before he had considerably alleviated his guest’s unspoken curiosity by a short sketch of his antecedents and career.

The latter, it appeared, had been a decided failure, for Cyril Græme’s health had given way early in life, and he had

been forced to give up his profession and live a roving sort of existence in the sunnier climes of the south. And when maturer manhood brought him back the greatest of all earthly gifts, good health, there was scarcely money enough left to him to bury his weary young wife in the foreign land she loved so well, and to bring his motherless daughter back to his own kith and kin in the far black North.

A careful examination into his resources proved conclusively to the Rev. Cyril Græme that about £60 per annum was all which he would ever be likely to call his own; but, being easily contented, he thankfully accepted a kinsman's offer of living rent free in the old Border keep known as 'Dead Man's Folly'; and for

twelve years he had now existed happily in this solitary spot, engrossed in his art, and only making few and far between journeys to the great towns in his vicinity, whenever the sale of a picture, a new dress for Elsie, or a fresh hat for himself, became matters of stern and uncompromising necessity.

‘And so you live altogether up in this wild spot?’ observed Sir Horace by way of starting conversation with his fair companion, after a discreet snore had made it evident that her natural chaperon was in the ‘land of nod.’ ‘Aren’t you very dull at times, with only the wind and rain to listen to, and only the heather and the rocks to look at?’

‘No,’ laughed Elsie in her clear sweet voice, ‘we’re not dull in these parts; it’s

only in a town that I'd be feeling weary, I think !'

'Have you ever been in a really nice town? Where there might be crowds of people, and splendid shops, and theatres, and gardens, and music all day long if you liked it?' And Sir Horace Stuart looked curiously at the interested and intent face of his companion as she slowly answered :

'No, I've never seen what you would call a nice town, maybe, but I've felt what it would be like to be imprisoned betwixt houses and walls, where there is no smell of heather, where no birds sing, and where the sun can only shine on one side of the road at a time.'

Horace Stuart laughed at the ring of contempt in the mountain maiden's voice, as he said :

‘I think you’d change your mind if you were tried, all the same. Else you would be strangely unlike the rest of your sex!’

Elsie looked at him curiously. She was too womanly a woman not to feel thoroughly interested in other women and their ways, and her ignorance of the world added extra zest to her desire for gaining knowledge on this subject.

‘Do *all* women like towns?’ she asked humbly and rather apologetically. ‘Perhaps it’s because I’m not used to streets that I feel scarce able to breathe when I’m off the hills. But it must be nice to walk about amongst crowds of people, and see the grand shops and all,’ she added courteously, out of deference to her visitor’s probable opinion on such matters; ‘and oh, I would dearly like to see a fine play acted!’

Sir Horace derived some amusement during the next ten minutes by giving a graphic description of the most popular London plays of the year, and took quite an enthusiastic interest in watching the play of feature and ever-varying expression visible on his unsophisticated companion's face, as she listened with breathless attention to the sad and beautiful history of poor Pygmalion's statue love, or laughed merrily over the discomfiting adventures of the latest æsthetic poet who had failed to live up to a blue china teapot.

For some reason best known unto himself, Horace Stuart felt an odd reluctance to mention any plays save those at which even a whole *posse* of Mrs. Grundies could scarcely throw a stone, and when in

momentary absence of mind he drifted into telling the tale of Sarah Bernhardt's marvellous representation of the ill-fated 'Dame aux Camélias,' he found himself unconsciously 'bowdlerising' that saddest of life's histories in a manner that would assuredly have caused M. Dumas to feel mightily astonished.

And yet, when he came to the scene where the noble-hearted sinner renounces the man she loves for his own sake, and cuts off all hope for herself in one desperate effort to save him who is all in all to her, a wild strange light shone in Elsie Græme's eyes, as she passionately exclaimed :

'Ay, that was a real woman! That was truth, real truth!'

Sir Horace looked keenly at his com-

panion's face, then shrugged his shoulders with a little sarcastic movement full of meaning. And as he shortly after hobbled slowly away to his night's rest in an adjacent chamber, he murmured softly to himself: 'So there's a dash of the tiger in this pretty young kitten! I like her all the better for it, though.'

CHAPTER III.

A DREAM OF SABBATH BELLS.

‘Weigh justly, throw good and bad in
The scales, will the balance veer
With the joys or the sorrows had in
The sum of a life’s career?
In the end, spite of dreams that sadden
The sad, or the sanguine madden,
There is nothing to grieve or gladden,
There is nothing to hope or fear.

‘Is this dry land sure? Is the sea sure?
Is there ought that shall long remain,
Pain, or peril, or pleasure,
Pleasure, or peril, or pain?
Shall we labour or take our leisure,
And who shall inherit treasure,
If the measure with which we measure
Is meted to us again?

‘I am slow in learning, and swift in
Forgetting, and I have grown
So weary with long sand sifting.
T’wards the mist where the breakers moan
The rudderless bark is drifting
Through the shoals and the quicksands shifting
In the end shall the night-rack lifting,
Discover the shores unknown?’

LINDSAY GORDON.

CHAPTER III.

TEN days later on, a Sabbath morning broke bright and clear over the purple haze of mountain and moorland, and the 'tinkle tinkle' of a primitive little church bell reached even to the far-away old tower of Dead Man's Folly, as Elsie Græme stood in the doorway, shading her eyes with one hand from the brightness of the sun's rays.

Not even yet had Sir Horace Stuart taken his departure from the hospitable shelter which had, on the night of his accident, been offered to him, though, with

the help of a stick, he could now walk perfectly well, and was fain to admit even to himself that his rapid recovery left little excuse for a longer sojourn. But, having had all his baggage and his many comforts carefully transported to him, he found his position quite happy and comfortable enough to leave his mind free to study the phases of character which his companions of the hour presented to him, and as regarded one of those companions at least, this study was becoming more and more interesting to him with every day that dawned.

To Horace Stuart there was something strangely fascinating in the bright frank nature of Elsie Græme. Had there been even the vaguest shadow of vulgarity hanging over her, his sensitive, ultra-refined taste would have taken dire offence

at once; but no one could listen to the low sweet voice, or meet the clear true eyes of this young mountain maiden, without at once realising that here ignorance meant merely innocence of the world, and a lowly station in life, the simple result of circumstances. And Sir Horace had not lived eight-and-thirty years of his life without having achieved a thorough intuition into the many varied characteristics of that exasperating sex known as 'fair.'

He always flattered himself that he had become quite conversant with their wiles even by the time he had reached his three-and-twentieth year, but in this he was probably mistaken. Young soldiers often give brilliant examples of their power as an attacking force, but tactics of defence are very apt to require cooler heads and

maturer wisdom. At this age also, he was accustomed to think of himself as thoroughly *blasé*, a mistake common to the nobler sex, and one which at times they sorely repent them of in the dust and ashes of after life! Not but what there may be men of even three-and-twenty who, though not one whit tired of shooting, fishing, riding to hounds, or any other healthy outdoor work, may feel disappointed with very many things in life for all that; and to these it is the higher side of life, *not* its 'pleasure' side, which seems the failure. Even a child, sated with too many toys, may experience that feeling of satiety which the world calls by the pretty name of *blasé*; but only those who have felt, thought, and suffered, can know the direful meaning of that saddest

of all words *désillusionné*; and to some it comes early, and to some it comes late, and to some, never at all!

Horace Stuart was a man who had spent his life in pleasing himself, and to do him justice his efforts had as yet been invariably crowned with success. Lack of money had never caused his shoe to pinch, lack of health had never tried him, lack of heart had saved him many a pang. Clever, selfish, and unscrupulous as he was in many things, a more thorough gentleman, even in his sins, it were impossible to find; and in these days, when 'trade marks' so far outnumber 'hall marks,' such men are rare.

But an early training in the Diplomatic Service, wherein the first ten years of his manhood had been passed in the pleasure-

loving capitals of Vienna and Paris,—and his later years, which had mainly been spent in foreign travel, interspersed by London seasons,—had made him what he was : a clever, charming man of the world, with very little faith left in anything or anybody in it. And for such a man there lay a powerful attraction in the character of Elsie Græme from its very dissimilarity to his own,—for she was a woman whose faith in life it was to do good to others whensoever or wheresoever the chance might come to hand—to judge all things on earth by the creed of fearless honour, and to judge all things in Heaven by the creed of fearless trust.

Nor was she behindhand in education, strange to say, rather the reverse ; for the father's love of reading and devotion to

art had born fruit in the daughter, and her early years spent in foreign lands had at least taught her more foreign languages than it falls to the lot of most English girls to learn.

Few women had received more careful training in life than Elsie Græme; and though the many books she had read might possibly have formed a somewhat old-fashioned and miscellaneous collection,—they were honest, healthy books, with power in their pages and grace in their lines—such books as go far towards forming the character of their readers.

But it was as an artist that Elsie chiefly shone. Accustomed as was Sir Horace Stuart to studying the glorious triumphs of painted canvas which crowd the galleries and churches of continental cities to excess,

his cultivated taste at once appreciated the unmistakable genius which gave such force and power to even the roughest sketches done by her hand. And as the girl spoke to him frankly of her artist dreams, and her hopes and fears for the years to come, he realised that a brilliant future lay possibly before her, a future, too, in which he would have no part.

Would he regret this, he wondered? as on this sunny Sabbath he paced slowly along by Elsie's side, on their way to the little kirk where every week a minister from a place many a mile away came to preach and pray to the simple hillside folk who formed his small congregation.

That he should be on his way to any church at all, struck Sir Horace Stuart in a wondering light; but when he had

expressed a doubt as to his going, the astonished glance which met him from Elsie's unsophisticated eyes, and the shade of disappointment perceptible in her voice as she asked: 'Will you not come?' had proved too much for his manhood, and so he had resigned himself to 'being a humbug,' as he phrased it internally, and followed his young guide along the mountain path, thinking stranger thoughts than he had thought for many a year.

Somehow, life seemed so clear and simple as he sat by Elsie's side on the time-worn, oaken seat of honour, near to the pulpit, and listened to the old white-haired minister's true and heart-felt words. The keen and rugged face of each man in the congregation, with its look of

deep attention and honest reverence, interested him strangely; and even the shepherd dogs, many of which were present, quietly clasped between their owner's knees, seemed impressed by the solemnity of their position, for the youngest collie amongst them dared not indulge in any more energetic movement than an occasional quiet snap at some especially irritating fly. Nor were the women of the congregation less sober and discreet in their conduct than the men, and the few sonsie lasses present seemed absorbed in their hymn-books,—an occupation from which, for once in his life, Sir Horace made no effort to distract them.

A strange feeling of calm and quiet seemed to pervade this little white-washed church, with its old oak rafters and worm-

eaten seats, and its primitive stone font and pulpit.

And when the last words of the concluding hymn had died away, and each dog rose and shook himself as each master rose and grasped his hat and left the church, Sir Horace Stuart found himself following the congregation out into the fresh, open air, still wrapt in meditations deep, and with unsolved problems disturbing his mind.

Was this quiet, peaceful life the truest happiness after all ? he vaguely wondered. Were change of scene and unceasing excitement the *only* means by which to render life worth living ? Or would peace on earth and goodwill towards men be assured by a placid, uneventful existence ?

Sir Horace started as the muffled toll

of the little church bell above him seemed to ring out the answer to his question, whilst a humble procession, carrying a small white-draped coffin, entered the sunny hillside kirkyard wherein he stood. 'So death can step in even here,' he thought bitterly. And as he glanced at the wailing woman clad in black, who laid her head down on the coffin in a wild paroxysm of grief and despair, he again wondered: *where* was 'peace on earth'?

'One should never regret the passing bell when it is rung for a little child,' said Elsie Græme's low tender voice at his side, and he felt the truth of her words. Better, far better, to leave the world as a little sinless child, than live to become—what?

Quietly the two wended their way back

to whence they came, mutual sympathy bringing a thoughtful silence on both their hearts,—that intuitive sympathy which springs only from the truest and tenderest feelings of the human soul.

And more than once did the clever, fastidious man of the world find himself calmly speculating on what life would be like to a man who might be content to pass his days in some wild mountain land, with a noble and true-hearted woman by his side.

‘Bah! I am becoming a drivelling idiot in my old age!’ soliloquised Sir Horace grimly, as he followed Elsie’s light step through the postern door of the old Border keep. ‘Fancy an Arcadian romance, full of rustic simplicity,—with Horace Stuart, *ex-attaché*, as hero of the same!’ And

the remembrance of 'a day that is dead,'—
a certain romance which had taken place
in Ireland ten years ago, and in which he
had acted only too prominent a part,—
hung heavy on his soul, as he muttered
low : 'Poor Helen ! if I could forget *her*,
how could I trust myself to keep faith
with even an angel from Heaven ?'

CHAPTER IV.

A DREAM OF BLUE EYES.

'O, young Lochinvar is come out of the west,
Through all the wide border his steed was the best ;
And save his good broadsword, he weapons had none,
He rode all unarm'd, and he rode all alone.
So faithful in love, and so dauntless in war,
There never was knight like the young Lochinvar.'

CHAPTER IV.

‘YE can’t do it, Eila?’

‘An’ why will I not?’

‘The wee mare’s got the divil in her to-day.’

‘Anyhow, I’ll try. Mind yerself now!’

Sunny-haired, blue-eyed Eila O’Connor gives a gay laugh, as she slowly rides a wiry little bay galloway a few paces back into the field behind her, and then boldly charges it at a low gap in the stone wall upon which her cousin Cornelius sits cross-legged, prepared to criticise the performance.

The girl rides bareback, with only a rough halter made of twisted straw round her steed's neck. So, perhaps, it is no wonder that the galloway gains the mastery, and positively refuses to leave her pasture ground, rough and uninviting as the latter looks.

Besides, equine endurance has its limit, and the 'wee mare' had been galloped round the field, and leaped over sundry small obstacles several times already this afternoon by the enterprising Eila, and so she now takes decided steps to regain her liberty and enjoy a little repose. One good hard kick dislodges Miss O'Connor from her back, an equally successful plunge backwards tears the end of the straw halter out of the latter's tightly-clenched little hand, and in another

moment the little bay galloway is galloping off in triumph, whilst Miss Eila rises slowly from her undignified position on the heathery grass, trying hard to look supremely indifferent to the peals of laughter which resound from the top of the wall whereon sits her cousin Cornelius.

Far and wide, so far as the eye could see, so wide as the fancy could travel, seemed one never-ending tract of mountain and moor, divided in places with rough stone walls, which merely marked out where here and there some few acres of land might be interspersed with rushes and pasturage of such like nutritious nature, in distinction to the larger circumference which was covered with heather alone. Gray rocks scattered on the mountain sides, and large tracts of sombre,

black-looking bog lands, gave a wild, chill aspect to the whole, and in one direction alone could any sign of care or culture be discerned. This was where a group of trees surrounded the once famous castle of the O'Connors, now merely a large crumbling pile of masonry, wherein but a limited number of rooms were habitable.

Ancient traditions in the south-west of Ireland gave it to be supposed that Castle Connor had once been a power not of name alone, a stronghold which had given shelter to many a rebel against Dutch William's ponderous rule, and where all principles concerning the civilising law of *meum et tuum*, were oftentimes sadly mixed. Now the glory of old had departed, never more to return, and the last of the O'Connors was a worn-out old man, broken in

health and broken in fortunes, and glad to let the two or three most habitable rooms in his old house, together with the right of shooting over his wild mountains and moors, to a younger and a richer man.

The latter chanced to be an Englishman and a cockney, an eminent drysalter, Joseph Stubbs by name. This worthy young man,—who in all truth was worthiness itself, if a shade stupid and more than many shades vulgar,—had made his appearance on the scene during the shooting season of the previous year; had arrived with more luggage, and guns, and dogs, than had ever been seen in that unsophisticated locality before, and was accompanied by a ‘gentleman’s gentleman,’ who took his departure the very

day after his arrival in unmitigated disgust at the whole of his surroundings.

Mr. Joseph Stubbs, however, stuck to his unpromising fate with manly resignation, and was rewarded by finding that the rough, unpreserved shooting far exceeded his expectations, and that his landlord chieftain's blue-eyed daughter Eila far exceeded in merry grace and beauty any young lady he had ever met with during the five-and-thirty years of life which he had passed in the city of London.

One or two stray visits during the course of the winter, ostensibly for the purpose of snipe shooting, etc., served only to strengthen and deepen the impression made by Eila's blue eyes and merry laugh on the heart and soul of the

amorous drysalter ; and as he had no one but himself to consult in the matter, he decided it out of hand one fine day, by demanding the hand of his only daughter from the astounded O'Connor.

So blue-eyed Eila was sent for from the back-yard precincts, where, truth to tell, she was amusing herself in riding see-saw on a plank, assisted by her young cousin Cornelius ; and a hurried hint from the kitchen wench, Bridget O'Flaherty, who had had her ear to the key-hole to some purpose whilst ' the masther ' and ' the sthranger ' were discussing the latter's proposal, resulted in a wisp of hay being robbed from the ' wee mare's ' scanty provender for the rubbing down and hurried cleansing of her young mistress' attire.

Hastily clearing her dress of odd bits

of hay which were still sticking to it, and smoothing her sunny locks with vehement activity, Miss O'Connor confronted her would-be suitor with a certain wonderment and shy grace, which quite carried him away. And for once he forgot his usual staid dignity of demeanour, and quite rose to the occasion, as he urged his suit in glowing words, and laid before the little Irish maiden all the many advantages which he had to offer.

Eila listened to him with great astonishment and a certain amount of awe. Could it be possible that she, Eila O'Connor, who had never ridden anything save the 'wee mare' barebacked, or driven in any grander equipage than a battered old jaunting car, was to possess the lovely stepping hacks and beautiful carriage-

horses which the drysalter artfully brought in to his assistance? And a house in London, too! A big house of her own, to which she could ask her father and Corney, and where perhaps the windows and doors would shut, and bells be found, and cushions to the chairs, and no holes in the carpet? The diamonds he spoke of were of less account in her eyes, for she took it for granted that they would be Irish diamonds, — and hadn't even Bridget O'Flaherty a brooch ornamented with those, which she wore on Saints' days and Sundays?

'I think it's just very kind of ye, Mr. Stubbs,' said the blushing bride calmly, in answer to her suitor's prayer. 'And it's not meself will say ye no, at all at all.'

And forthwith she received the dry-

salter's first embrace with great equanimity, and then flew off to the yard again to acquaint her inseparable companion Corney with her astounding good luck. And whilst finishing their interrupted see-saw, the two spent many minutes in building castles in the air, and devising plans for future pleasures of a higher order, wherein the grinning Cornelius was always to have his share.

Since the happy day upon which the amorous drysalter had 'told his love,' three months had passed by, and on the soft spring afternoon which saw 'O'Connor's child' landed plump upon mother earth from off her little steed's back, he was expected to arrive once more at Castle Connor, there to abide until the wedding-day should come in ten

days' time. The intervening week was that in which Punchestown races were to be held, and it was a long standing promise to the bride-elect, that she should attend that festivity for the first time in her life,—an event which, in her own private estimation, far exceeded in importance the wedding ceremony which was to follow the week after.

Besides the happy bridegroom, sundry nondescript members of the O'Connor family were also expected this day,—for the O'Connor was proudly determined to uphold the grandeur of his ancient lineage, and a week of merry-making and festivity had always been '*de rigueur*' on such occasions.

'Corney,' said Eila gravely, as she sat on the wall beside him, absently twisting a spray of bell heather between her little

rosy fingers, 'it's a fine thing to be going to be married!'

'Thru for you, Eila,' answered Cornelius with equal gravity. 'It's just years since the like of the pies, and the puddings, and the barrels of whiskey, have been seen in the glen! An' the turkeys and chickens, and other bastes, that are hangin' up in the larder,—did ye see them now?' he added with enthusiasm.

'Deed an' I did.'

'Yes, it's yerself's a lucky girl, Eila, an' so I tell ye.'

'Wisht now, Corney, I want to ask ye something. Will I always have to live with Mr. Stubbs?'

'In coorse. Why, Eila, I'm thinkin' ye're just "fey"! Where would a wife stop save in her man's own house?'

‘Deed, I suppose so,’ replied the girl half sadly.

‘An’ a fine big house it’ll be,’ said Corney cheerfully, realising intuitively that his companion somehow felt at odds with her fate to-day.

‘I wonder now if I’ll be happy in a big town, Corney?’ hazarded Eila again doubtfully, with a certain wistfulness in the look which she cast at the free wild moorlands and grand purple mountains surrounding her.

‘An’ why wouldn’t ye? Won’t ye have horses, and carriages, and fine servants, and all—and—and—Mr. Stubbs?’ finished Corney rather lamely.

‘Yes,—and Mr. Stubbs,’ echoed Eila meditatively.

‘See now, there’s a car comin’ up the

road!' exclaimed Cornelius at this juncture. 'It'll be some of the aunts or cousins, I'm thinkin'.'

'Where?' responded Eila excitedly, for visitors to Castle Connor were rare, and proportionately important.

'It's only one person, and that one's only a man,' said Eila, in a tone of disappointment, after they had strained their eyes vainly for more than a minute.

'Maybe it's our cousin from out o' the West?' conjectured Cornelius slowly.

'To be sure it is,' assented his companion, as, all unseen themselves (for a hurried descent behind the wall had been effected), they cautiously 'took stock' of the occupant of the advancing car.

'He's too smart for any of our lot,' whispered Eila critically. 'An' see now,

he's smoking a wee bit of white paper! Did ye ever see the like o' that?' she exclaimed in bewilderment.

Even Corney could not offer any suggestion with regard to this latter problem, for cigarettes were unknown mysteries to him. But his quick eye detected another object of still more engrossing interest.

'Did ye see the whip that was fastened to his sticks and fishing-rod, Eila? A weany whip, like that which Uncle O'Brien rode with at the Curragh races, and which is to be mine some day, please God. That's the whip he'll use at Punchestown, I'll be bound!' and Corney danced up and down with excitement.

'Sure, then, it *must* be Cousin Valentine Bourke, from Galway!' eagerly agreed

Eila. 'And father says he's got just the best horse in all the West.'

'That's saying a good deal,' observed Cornelius sententiously.

'And why wouldn't he?' queried Eila in retort. 'Sure he's got the money, Corney, and there never was a Bourke of them all that couldn't ride finely, father says.'

'Well, well, I won't contradict that same,' said Cornelius in a critical tone.

'I'd like to have seen him a wee bit nearer,' observed Eila pensively.

'Well, won't ye see him quick enough by getting up and comin' home now?' suggested her cousin.

Eila jumped up with alacrity, and together they proceeded towards the home of their ancestors.

‘ I hear the noise of wheels ! ’ exclaimed Corney suddenly. ‘ An ’ ’ deed I see another car comin’ up the hill now, an’ it’s Mr. Stubbs, Eila—I’d know his white hat a mile off.’

‘ I think we’ll go a bit round before we go home, Corney,’ said the bride-elect quietly.

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CHAPTER V.

A FACE IN THE CROWD.

‘ He staid not for brake, and he stopp’d not for stone,
He swam the Eske river where ford there was none ;
But ere he alighted at Netherby gate,
The bride had consented, the gallant came late ;—
For a laggard in love, and a dastard in war,
Was to wed the fair Ellen of brave Lochinvar.’

CHAPTER V.

AN inspiriting chaos was reigning throughout Castle Connor on this evening, and Captain Valentine Bourke of Her Majesty's —th Regiment, smiled to himself with intense inward amusement, at the ludicrous incidents which each moment brought forth. That hospitable mansion was thronged with relatives of every description, from the nearest O'Connors, to the very farthest cousins, ofttimes removed, of the Bourkes, from which family the O'Connor's wife had sprung.

To attend upon these numerous guests

of every degree, a strange medley of rough and ignorant Irish servants had been hastily congregated together, the whole cortege being under the command of old Thady M'Quin, butler, bailiff, keeper, fisherman, and purveyor, to the O'Connor and his family in general.

To do these auxiliary forces justice, they had done wonders since their arrival upon the scene, strength of arm and willingness of spirit taking the place of experience or knowledge of any sort or kind. But at least the old rooms had had a thorough cleaning, an event which only took place on great occasions, 'the misthress' buryin'' having been the last time when it occurred, and that was when Eila was only a little mite of three years old. And there was some sort of a bed

in each room, though it would have been unwise perhaps to criticise its structure too severely ; and most of the doors would open now (one or two indeed went so far as never to shut), and there was at least one strip of carpet to each individual, looking like an oasis in the desert of each large bare bedroom.

And then the downstairs 'soot' of rooms, as Thady M'Quin proudly called them, what a metamorphosis was there !

All the litter, chiefly of implements connected with sport, which had been wont to lie disregarded in every part of the few habitable 'living-rooms' of the old ruin, was now with one accord relegated to the farthest corner of the house, *i.e.* 'the masther's business - room,' which latter was rapidly assuming the appearance

of an auction mart, or the shop of some second-class pawnbroker, so crowded was the floor with guns, fishing-rods, landing-nets, game bags, odd sacks of potatoes, broken chairs, leaking cans, cracked pottery, and last, not least, the picture of an ancestor. The latter had met with a misfortune, for the staid dignity of his grimly saturnine visage had not exempted it from the task of officiating as a target for pistol practice apparently, and whereas one bullet had found its billet in his right eye, another had torn the corner of his severe mouth awry, giving his dignified features a leering air, awful to contemplate. So, lest this indecorous but most unintentional levity on his part should shock the feebler minds of his female descendants, his portrait had been hurriedly

taken down from off the wall, and the picture of last year's winner of the Conyng-ham Cup at Punchestown had been put up in its place,—a great improvement in the eyes of Master Cornelius.

Thanks to the general removal of dirt and disorder, the really fine old carved tables and chairs came out in all their glory; and requisition on every bedroom in the house had resulted in the collection of some marvellous furniture of the antique style, which was solemnly spread at intervals throughout the huge desolate drawing-room. But Eila's hand and Eila's taste had stepped in here, and every bare corner of the room was filled with bracken and bulrushes, and 'flag' lilies, gathered from every glen and bog in the neighbourhood; whilst whole masses of shining dark

green arbutus seemed to spring up from every side, planted, if the truth were known, in stable buckets, artistically concealed.

Valentine Bourke was a tall, good-looking young soldier, of about eight-and-twenty, thin as a lathe, but with muscles of iron, suggestive of a life of constant training for some sport or other, with always a cheery smile on his handsome face, and with what gipsies call 'a wicked eye.' As he made his way across the big drawing-room on this same night, steering his way cautiously through the bevy of sisters, cousins, and aunts surrounding him, the said wicked eye lighted on a bright little face shining like a ray of sunlight in its dark corner at the farthest end of the room, and straightway he marched determinedly up to it, saying frankly:

‘I’m boldly going to introduce myself, if I may, for I know that we *must* be cousins in some sort of generation or another, and so it’s quite allowable, isn’t it?’

‘Quite,’ replied Eila demurely. ‘I think you’re Cousin Valentine Bourke, from out of the West?’ she added inquiringly.

‘To be sure I am. And you, are you a Bourke or an O’Connor? For I think you are bound to belong to one clan or the other here,’ said Captain Bourke, laughing.

‘Shure, I’m Eila, ye know.’

‘*Are* you?’ observed her companion with some astonishment, and involuntarily glancing from the fair little face beside him to the sallow, dyspeptic countenance of Mr. Joseph Stubbs as seen in the dis-

tance, regarding them both with a look of vague distrust.

‘Yes, that’s him,’ observed Eila placidly, following her cousin’s look towards the happy bridegroom.

‘He’s — ahem! — he’s very — nice, I should think,’ stammered Captain Bourke, a little taken aback by his cousin’s quickness.

‘He’s that,’ answered Eila laconically.

‘And I’m glad to take this chance of congratulating you, which, indeed, I do most sincerely,’ continued Valentine Bourke a little stiffly, trying to recover his shaken *aplomb*. ‘You will enjoy the excitement of London life all the more from its novelty.’

‘Maybe I will, maybe I won’t,’ answered Eila half sadly.

‘My dear child, at your time of life you’d enjoy *anything*, from a State ball to blind man’s buff; and you’d like *anybody*, from a king on his throne to—to——’

‘To Mr. Stubbs,’ put in Eila naively.

‘Ye—s, to—to Mr. Stubb’s,’ echoed her cousin lamely.

‘I’m thinkin’ that the big house and all the grand horses will be about the best of it!’ said Eila with childish frankness.

Valentine Bourke looked at her earnestly, but failed to detect the slightest *arrière pensée* in the expression of her bright candid face, and clear child’s eyes.

‘How long have you known Mr. Stubbs, Eila? (I suppose I may call you Eila, as we are near relations?)’ he asked quietly.

‘Of course ye may. Oh, we’ve known

Mr. Stubbs ever since he first came to shoot, ye know, and that would be about the 12th of August, until Punchestown time now, ye see; so that's eight months,' answered Eila, counting slowly on her fingers.

'And I suppose he has been over here pretty often during that time?' inquired her cousin, an odd feeling of jealousy strengthening rapidly in his heart with every glance at the brightly beautiful little face beside him.

'Deed no. He came just the once for grouse shootin', ye know, and the once for snipe shootin'; then the once for courtin', and now he's come for the marryin',' responded the bride-elect philosophically, again counting on her fingers to ensure a proper accuracy in her statement.

Captain Valentine Bourke felt more severely nonplussed than had ever been his luck to feel before. With a rapidly-growing admiration for this unsophisticated little cousin, there arose also in his heart a profound pity for her, based on the too certain sorrow which such an utterly uncongenial marriage must, perforce, bring in its train. His knowledge of the world alone could draw a sad enough picture of the future which lay in store for this merry little maid, cooped up in a town house, with no fresh heathery breezes to blow away the cobwebs from her brain ; with no friends, save vulgar, extravagant women, who judged everything in this world by the standard of money alone ; with no occupations, save dressing, driving, eating, and drinking, and no com-

panion in her everyday life save Mr. Joseph Stubbs. The obvious innocence of the victim, too, and her humble acceptance of her 'good luck,' redoubled his feelings of indignation; for it was so thoroughly self-evident that this time, at least, there could be no question of a woman's deliberately selling herself for 'filthy lucre,' one glance at the clear child's eyes confronting his own told him *that* far plainer than words could have done.

And yet how could the sacrifice, which was now so near its consummation, be averted? What right had he to take to heart his little cousin's fate, or seek to interfere between the drysalting bridegroom and his bride? And Valentine Bourke sighed deeply, and looked graver

than mortal man had ever seen him look, as he revolved this perplexing problem in his mind ; whilst light-hearted Eila flitted gaily about among her father's guests, merrily rallying her ally Cornelius on his new-found 'company manners,' that unhappy youth, with his flaming red locks toned down by the aid of pomatum into a rich Rembrandt tint, having been so awed by the quantity if not quality of the numberless female relatives who had embraced him on arrival, that, to use his own expression, he 'was fairly bothered !'

But ere many days were passed, the problem which had so perplexed Valentine Bourke on the first night of his arrival at Castle Connor solved itself in quite the most natural way in the world. For a few more days and hours spent in the society

of Eila O'Connor not only convinced him that she was, and ever would be, *the* one woman in the world to him, but also that he too might be the only man in the world who would ever teach her the old old story of love and life,—the story which sooner or later every woman on earth must learn either to her sorrow or her joy. And so there came a time when out of the fulness of the heart the mouth spake,—and these wicked young people awoke from a dream of bliss which had lasted exactly one long half-hour (spent in a certain secluded arbour that was a well-known haunt for every beetle, spider, and earwig, on the whole O'Connor demesne), to face the appalling reality of Mr. Joseph Stubbs and what to do with him !

It is to be feared that but scant justice

or mercy were meted out then to that worthy but ill-starred drysalter. Captain Bourke indeed went so far as to accuse him of being a 'selfish, unnatural scoundrel,' for having had the temerity to do exactly as he had done himself, in falling in love with blue-eyed Eila. And even the latter, forgetful of the promised riches and good things which had been so freely offered her, was heard more than once in the course of conversation contemptuously to allude to the lately esteemed Mr. Stubbs as 'the likes o' him indeed!'

It naturally occurred to both that the most proper and straightforward line of action to take under the circumstances would be to bravely avow the change which had come o'er the latter, and also Eila's earnest desire to be released from

what appeared to her now a dire and most tragical fate. But how could she face the howls of reprobation from all the relatives assembled together to witness the sacrifice,—the angry reproaches of her father,—the stolid surprise of the bridegroom-elect,—the only too certain separation from the man she loved so much better than that ill-fated wight! No, it was not to be thought of for a moment.

‘Shure, it’s meself would just die of shame!’ sobbed the luckless bride-elect. ‘An’ all this grand company come to see me married, and the turkeys and fowls all killed,—ah me! ah me!’

‘Hush, little girl, don’t sob so pitifully, *don’t*, darling,’ murmured Valentine Bourke distractedly, folding Mr. Joseph Stubbs’ promised bride in his arms, with a stern

determination to face the worst that fate could do, sooner than let her escape from them. 'We'll hit on a plan yet, dear! Don't despair, whatever you do, else it will be all up with us, Eila, for no one can help us except ourselves.'

Whereupon Miss O'Connor dried her blue eyes with tearful fortitude, and listened to her cousin with much interest, whilst he propounded to her a deep-laid scheme which had dawned upon him with a sudden inspiration, and which promised a future of untold happiness to them both, but of perturbation and dismay to Mr. Joseph Stubbs, drysalter, of London city.

CHAPTER VI.

A DREAM OF FORTUNE.

‘ The wide gulf that parts us may yet be no wider
Than that which parts you from some being more blest,
And there may be more links ’twixt the horse and his rider
Than ever your shallow philosophy guess’t.

‘ In all strife where courage is tested, and power,
From the meet on the hill-side, the horn-blast, the find,
The burst, the long gallop that seems to devour
The champaign, all obstacles flinging behind.

‘ *You* sin, and *you* suffer, and we too find sorrow,
Perchance through *your* sin—yet it soon will be o’er ;
We labour to-day, and we slumber to-morrow,
Strong horse and bold rider !—and *who knoweth more ?*’

LINDSAY GORDON.

CHAPTER VI.

THE bright April sun shines down merrily on the crowded race-course of Punchestown, Ireland, as young Sir Horace Stuart saunters listlessly about, seeking whom he may know. If he cannot find many people he knows, at least he finds one whom he wishes to know,—as a sudden lift of a large white sunshade brings to his view as lovely a face as the Emerald Isle can boast of.

‘I say, Bourke!’ and Sir Horace’s quiet voice sounds unusually eager as he lays a detaining hand on Captain Valentine

Bourke's arm, who happens to be just passing by. 'Can you tell me who that girl in black-and-white is, with a big white sunshade? She's just looking this way.'

'*That?* Don't you know her, Stuart? Why, it's Helen Vansittart, the new Dublin beauty,—that is, of a certain set.'

'She's a rare pretty girl. Anything odd about her?' asks Sir Horace with interest.

'No,' responds Captain Bourke in rather a dubious tone, 'only she comes from the West Indies, and so no one knows much about her, and the father's a most drunken old brute.'

'From the West Indies! And Vansittart is the name? Why, I believe she's a sort of cousin of mine.'

'Don't envy you the relationship,' observes Valentine Bourke drily.

‘Don’t you? Well, *I* covet it very much,’ and Sir Horace’s cold grey eyes light up strangely. ‘What’s more, you must introduce me to her at once, my dear boy, it’s only right that I should make acquaintance with my relations, especially if they all resemble *her!*’

‘Oh, well, come along then,’ exclaims Val Bourke impatiently, ‘for I’ve got a horse to look after and have no time to spare.’

As the introduction is hurried over, the big sunshade lifts itself sufficiently to enable Sir Horace Stuart carefully to criticise the most perfectly beautiful face he has ever seen; and their undoubted relationship having been satisfactorily proved and approved, the young man saunters away with a great affectation of

indifference, after engaging himself to come and fetch Miss Vansittart for a stroll in the saddling-paddock previous to the great race of the day.

Horace Stuart knows every turn of that fascinating and peace-destroying game which, so long as the world goes on, will be played out between men and women for ever and aye. And he is not a man to play his trumps save 'when in doubt,' which, to judge by the expression of his face, is scarcely now. So he wanders about aimlessly, taking care that a certain white sunshade is not held too low for its owner to note his apparent indifference to everything, until the Irish Grand Military is the race timed to come off next, and all the competitors are preparing for the great event of the day.

The entries for the same are considerable, and such is the valour and the love of sport amongst the soldiers of Great Britain and Ireland, that more than half of the horses entered are here on the spot, ready to give an account of themselves to the weal or woe of their backers. The appearance of some of them possibly creates a shade of doubt whether they have any business in such a scene at all ; and there is almost a mournful look discernible on the sober countenances of one or two veteran hunters, who, at the end of a hard season with the Meath, the Kildare, or the 'Wards,' find themselves abruptly called upon to turn into steeplechasers, for the benefit and amusement of the sundry junior officers who chance to own them.

On the other hand, the three animals

which alone have been backed for any money in good earnest, stand out prominently from the rest with regard to their appearance and reputation, both of which can lay claim to more than common interest.

The public favourite is 'Vallombrosa,' a brown mare, full of quality and singularly good-looking, who has already won more than one steeplechase in far better company than she is in to-day, and so great things are expected of her. Moreover, she will have the advantage of being steered by one of the most determined and yet quietest riders in the service—whose coolness of head will more than counterbalance her hotness of temper—so say those who should know.

The second favourite is a well-known

old stager called 'Meteor,' who has run over every course in England and Ireland and has never been known to fall, but whose well-bandaged forelegs look as if they might give an unpleasant feeling to his rider when landing down a drop, and to an accurate observer the horse looks jaded and over-trained.

" 'Grey Somnus,' by the Drone, why, that's the horse I wanted to buy of Bourke last year, only he wouldn't sell him,' observed a tall Hussar, as he strolled amongst the horses in the saddling-paddock, arm-in-arm with a friend.

'You were well out of him, then; if this is the horse!' exclaimed the latter, as a great ungainly grey was led slowly past them, and in truth he was an ugly brute enough. A huge fiddle head, with the smallest of

sleepy eyes, a neck that no tons of Thorley's Food could ever have put a crest on ; flat-sided, ragged-hipped, and with a tail that was ashamed to stick itself out, and swung pensively like that of a cow, 'Grey Somnus' was no beauty, and his best friends could not deny this. And yet, to a connoisseur in horse-flesh, he possessed three strikingly good points at least,—a depth of girth which told of stoutness of heart and unfailing stamina, hindquarters of extraordinary power, and legs that looked as if made of nothing less than a compound of cast-iron and steel, to which hard ground or soft, bad going or good, would be all alike.

But the chief characteristic of 'Grey Somnus' was his extraordinary sleepiness of mind and manners,—from which attri-

bute he had derived his name. Few in the world had seen his little slits of eyes ever open the least bit wider, and his normal condition much resembled that of an equine sleep-walker. Even at this supreme moment it took constant reminders to 'Hurry up, now!' from the man who was leading him about, to keep him awake at all, so utterly bored did he seem with the whole of his surroundings.

'That's the harse wull win, yer honners!' exclaimed a young farmer, whose accent marked him as from out of the West. 'Shure now, don't I tell ye so afore iver the race is run?' he added excitedly.

'I suppose you bred him yourself, my man?' queried the tall Hussar, with a laugh.

'Deed I did not. It's jist knowin' him

that makes me to say what I do, and sorra a lie I'm tellin' ye !'

'Well, what can he do ?' asked his interlocutor, somewhat amused.

'I'll jist tell ye now. He can't gallop as fast maybe as thim flimsy things that go like the divil for a mile and thin can get no farther, but he'll jist go from Lady Day to Michaelmas-tide, an' sorra a hair he'd turn !'

'And is he safe over a country ?'

'Can he throw a lep, d'ye mane ? There's not a place in the West that's big enough for him,' continued the grey horse's champion with ardour. 'An' see, now, there's the Captin himself goin' to ride him, an' a better man or harse niver stepped,—they'll be bad to bate. Good luck to ye, Captin !' he added heartily, as

Valentine Bourke gave him a kindly nod of recognition in passing by.

Eila was with him, trying hard not to show by her face the dire disappointment which the sight of 'Grey Somnus' ungainliness has caused her, the first drawback to an, as yet, perfect day of bliss.

'Don't break your heart, which is no longer yours, over his ugliness, little cousin,' says Val Bourke in his cheery tones. 'Handsome is that handsome does; and he'll be useful to both of us, my dear, before all's done.'

'To *both* of us?' repeats Eila inquiringly.

'Yes, I shouldn't wonder. However, at this moment he's got his work cut out to be useful to me alone. I must

leave you with your father now, little woman, for time's up.'

'Oh, Val! *how* I hope ye'll win!' murmurs Eila ecstatically. 'I'll say he's just the beautifulest horse, and the best, in all Ireland, if only he'll beat them all to-day!' And tears of excitement and anxiety dim the little maid's bright blue eyes.

A tall, singularly handsome girl turns to look at little Eila's innocent, anxious face, and then observes to the gentleman beside her:

'What it is to be young! That child looks as if her whole heart and soul were bound up in that hideous grey horse and that good-looking young soldier. I wish *I* could get up even a shadow of excitement over anything I see here!'

The speaker's haughtily contemptuous tone breaks strangely and suddenly, and the colour flies to her cheek and the light to her eyes. Her companion, watching her with some surprise, is only conscious of the vicinity of one or two strangers, amongst whom there is but one face that he knows by sight.

'So Horace Stuart has honoured Punctestown with his presence,' he observes carelessly, and is surprised at the change in his companion's tone when she answers:

'Sir Horace Stuart! yes, I see him. Will you tell him I want to speak to him? He is my cousin, you know.'

Miss Vansittart's companion is a man of the world, and of quite average intelligence. So he walks straight up to the baronet and gives his message, and

then takes himself off to the corner farthest from them both, with the muttered comment :

‘You’ve found something here after all, my fair Helen, that will some day give you more excitement than you quite wish, I’m thinking!’

‘How late you are, Sir Horace. I really could not wait any longer.’ But an almost deprecating look softens Helen Vansittart’s proud face as she speaks.

‘Am I? I beg your pardon, Miss Vansittart, but I had quite forgotten the time.’ (Helen bites her lip angrily.) ‘I wonder who that pretty little girl is over there,’ — carelessly noting Eila O’Connor’s sweet little fresh face, and honouring it with a very intent gaze. ‘Do

you see her? She is so like a Greuze, barring the freckles.'

'Some "squireen's" daughter or sister, I suppose,' answers Helen Vansittart in the clear *traînante* voice that is habitual to her. 'And it's not the slightest use your trying

"To break a country heart
For pastime ere you go to town,"

for I'm in a position to inform you that that blue-eyed child's heart is the undivided property of that good-looking young man who is superintending the saddling of that grey horse over there, Captain Valentine Bourke.'

'Ah, is it so? Then let me put myself out of all temptation to try and soften her lovely blue eyes towards *me*. But let us go back to the Stand, Miss

Vansittart, for I see the horses are just coming out. By Jove! what a beautiful mare that "Vallombrosa" is!

So thinks the crowd,—both high and low,—for the brown mare's name is on every lip; and the only sounds which can be culled from the Babel of voices in the ring are the fateful words: 'Six to four "Vallombrosa."'

The start is slightly delayed by the fractious eccentricities of the favourite, and the obstinate determination on the part of one astute old hunter to turn his tail to his new vocation; but they are off at last, and glasses go up and parasols go down, and a subdued murmur of excitement falls on the ear.

At first the incidents of the race are tame enough. 'Grey Somnus' has made

the running from the first, and brings his field along at a good fair pace, which must tell a tale ere long. However, the first time they pass the Stand the horses are all pretty near together; and their position, action, and style of fencing are loudly criticised by the excited crowd.

‘Grey Somnus’ leads by two or three lengths; and now can be seen the marvellous action which only his faster paces can ever do justice to. His ungainly form and low-carried head may mar his beauty, perhaps, but an Irish crowd is not one to be deceived in such matters; and as they watch the horse’s magnificent clock-work action and sweeping stride, and the way he covers each fence, as if it were mere child’s play to him, more than one frieze-coated looker-on exclaims: ‘Hoo-

roo for the grey harse! He'll beat the mare yet.'

Not so think the Stand and the aristocratic portion of the community, however, and their faith in the favourite seems amply justified as 'Vallombrosa' follows in the wake of the grey, pulling her rider nearly out of the saddle, and jumping every fence as it comes with a quick cat-like bound. Only her rider knows how near she has been down once or twice already, and that cool, quiet face of his is not likely to tell tales. The rest of the horses thunder on in the rear, headed by old 'Meteor,' until the well-known 'big double' brings confusion to their ranks. The grey horse apparently flies the whole thing, so quick is the backward stroke of his hoofs, as he just touches the bank with his hind-legs

and goes galloping on, to all appearances still half asleep. 'Vallombrosa' rushes at the obstacle with the desperate rush that tells of a failing heart, makes a fearful bungle of it and falls on her head, but is quickly recovered by the masterly hand of a most consummate horseman,—and is rapidly overtaking the leading horse in front, before the crowd has time to say more than one startled 'oh!'

Not so the party of sedate ex-hunters in the rear. Number one is a worthy old horse, but sadly blown. Number two is a rogue, but with plenty left in him; so he races up to the first-named animal and passes him, then swerves straight across him in a refusal within three strides of the fence, whereupon the brave but unfortunate Number one subsides into the ditch on

the take-off side, and remains there, to the wrath of his young but sanguine owner.

‘Meteor’ gets over safely, as he invariably does, and one or two more struggle along after him ; but even he is now only being persevered with on the chance of the two leading horses falling, and it is very evident that the race lies between those two, and they alone.

The brown mare creeps up to the grey horse’s girths, then reaches his shoulder, then his neck,—and Valentine Bourke takes up his whip in grim earnest.

‘The grey’s beat!’ rings out in one loud cry.

Is he? ‘Grey Somnus’ wakes up and opens his eyes for the first time, and as his owner shakes him up resolutely with hands and spurs, the horse answers

gamely and strides along at almost racing speed.

‘Bourke’s mad! He’s lost his head!’ exclaims one of his friends in dismay. ‘Why, he’s riding his horse already, and they have still nearly a mile to go!’

‘Niver fear, yer honner!’ calls out the frieze-coated individual, who had championed the grey horse and his rider from the first. ‘Sorra a bit he’s bate, the harse, —shure the Captin knows him. Give him the whip, Captin dear, give him the whip!’ he shouts in an ecstasy of excitement, as if his words could be heard almost a mile off.

One would almost fancy that they really do fall on the distant ears of Captain Valentine Bourke, so readily do his views seem to fall in with those of his adviser;

for he drives the grey horse along at what is evidently the latter's utmost speed, and though two fences still intervene between him and home, he sits down to ride him as if the race were almost over. Peculiar as these tactics are, Val Bourke knows well what he is about, and before the last fence is reached he holds 'Vallombrosa' safe. Every crack of the whip on the lazy grey's tough hide goes to the failing heart of the nervous mare, and she jumps the last two fences in a reckless haphazard fashion that loses her several yards of ground each time. And though her quiet rider does his living best to restore her confidence by sitting as still on her as he can, the moment comes when he must perforce call upon the unquestionable speed of the mare to make her keep her place ;

for in spite of appearances, it is evident to his keen eye that 'Grey Somnus' is not really beaten; for he fences in grander style than ever, and though not able to go one whit faster than he is now going, no one can say how long he will go on.

So, as soon as the last fence has been negotiated and her careful rider thinks it safe to make the effort, 'Vallombrosa' creeps up inch by inch to the grey horse's girths,—whose owner has been hard at him for the last hundred yards,—and a regular ding-dong race commences. Though the mare could possibly shake off her antagonist if she liked, her uncertain temper is all against her in so closely contested a race, and her last effort dies away to nothing; whilst 'Grey Somnus,'—who has made all his own running from beginning to end, and

has been hard ridden for nearly a mile,—wins easily by a length at the finish. In fact, the remark of his faithful champion and admirer: ‘Bedad, an’ the Captin’s more bate than his harse!’ is not very far from the truth; for even to a man in such perfect training as Valentine Bourke, the exertion of riding so idle and yet so resolute a horse as ‘Grey Somnus’ for four miles over a country, is a tolerably high trial.

Eila’s delight knows no bounds; and many hearty congratulations and words of praise are poured into Valentine Bourke’s ears, as is invariably the case when a man has won his race; for the loser in the game few words suffice, or oftenest none.

‘May I come and see you, Miss Vansittart, during the month or six weeks

which I mean to spend in Ireland, that is, provided the fish—and other things—are kind enough to prove encouraging?’ and Sir Horace bends low to glance under the white sunshade.

‘The fish will depend on the weather a good deal, so I can give no guess with regard to your success *there*,’ says Helen laughingly.

‘And what are my *other* chances of success, Miss Vansittart?’ inquires her companion earnestly. ‘Will you let me take rank at once as a cousin who will not only be proud to obey all cousinly behests, but who will always be at hand to—— (Bless my soul, I was just going to say “to love and to cherish,” etc.!) to—to be a true friend?’ he finishes vaguely.

Helen Vansittart lifts her sunshade at

last, and looks straight into his eyes with her wonderful far-seeing glance, and says quietly :

‘ I accept your offer, whether for good or ill.’

And as they pass on through the crowd more than one significant glance follows their retreating forms, whilst the tall Hussar aforementioned scruples not to say out loud :

‘ The young Baronet appears to have found a new goddess, and I must own that she is not only “divinely tall,” but also “most divinely fair!” ’

‘ Yes,’ answers a brother-officer of youthful and guileless disposition, and rather disposed to believe in the goodness of mankind. ‘ I hope he’ll marry her, too, for she’s too good to live such a life as

that **disreputable** old parent of hers leads her. Sir Horace Stuart quite gives one the **idea** of a man who might experience *une grande passion.*

His senior officer looks at the youth *steadily* for the space of a minute, then **takes** his cigar from his lips and observes sardonically :

‘My dear boy, Horace Stuart may have his faults as we all have, but he is not such a fool as *that.*’ .

CHAPTER VII.

THE FACE OF THE BANSHEE.

‘ So boldly he enter’d the Netherby Hall,
Among bride’smen, and kinsmen, and brothers, and all :
Then spoke the bride’s father, his hand on his sword,
(For the poor craven bridegroom said never a word,)
“ O come ye in peace here, or come ye in war,
Or to dance at our bridal, young Lord Lochinvar ?”

* * * * *

‘ One touch to her hand, and one word to her ear,
When they reached the hall-door, and the charger stood near ;
So light to the croupe the fair lady he swung,
So light to the saddle before her he sprung !
“ She is won ! we are gone, over bank, bush, and scaur,
They’ll have fleet steeds that follow,” quoth young Lochinvar.’

CHAPTER VII.

ONCE more it is evening in Castle Connor, and from its long range of dilapidated windows blaze forth a grand show of lights, collected from strange and impromptu sources known only to that presiding genius, Mr. Thady M'Quinn.

It was the eve of Eila O'Connor's wedding, and many of the guests were even now clad in their wedding garments, —whether from scarcity of apparel, or from a laudable desire to be dressed in time, remained a matter of doubt.

The little bride was sad and subdued in

manner, the bridegroom-elect was proportionately elated and bumptious. More than once it took all the tact of surrounding relatives to prevent an unseemly explosion of the ill-feeling which now obviously existed between himself and his future cousin, Captain Valentine Bourke, and it was with a sense of relief that the O'Connor saw the latter leave the room at last, with the ostensible excuse of 'going out for a smoke.'

Having seen his future son-in-law safely seated at a whist-table, in the company of two genial-minded cousins once removed, and of the parish priest, the old man departed from the room himself, to enjoy a stroll in the evening air and a quiet pipe, —secretly watched by the sharp eyes of the boy Cornelius.

Bright moonlight shone over grass, fence, and tree, and as the O'Connor paced slowly down between the avenue of sycamores which led up to the old castle, he pondered deeply and anxiously upon the future fate of his little daughter, so soon about to leave him and to go forth with a stranger into the wide, wide world. Somehow his son-in-law elect scarcely pleased him to-night ; his underbred jocosity and boisterous elation had set the old father's teeth on edge, and a new fear had found its way into the latter's heart lest little Eila should not be so happy in this man's hands as he had hoped and counted on.

Certainly he would have felt more at ease on the subject had she been going to marry that boy from out o' the West,—he

was a good fellow, Val Bourke, and a fine horseman, too ; but, of course, that was impossible now,—and the O'Connor sighed as he thought of his pledged word given to the drysalter, and of the coming morrow which should part him from his little blue-eyed daughter.

Hark ! the stamp of a horse's hoof strikes on his ear distinctly, and the old man takes his pipe out of his mouth and listens silently. Yes, there could be no doubt of it ! Some specimen of the equine race must be standing within a few yards of him, and if so, must also have invaded the most sacred precincts of 'the demesne,' for the sound came clearly from the very garden itself,—and the O'Connor hurried across the dew-wet grass to turn out the nocturnal invader.

The rambling over-grown garden lay bathed in silvery moonlight, bright as day, yet no living beast was to be seen either far or near, and the old man stood still and listened intently, in silence and perplexity.

An unnatural quiver in the branches of a large rhododendron bush, so common to Irish demesnes, attracted his attention, and circumventing it suddenly, he started back aghast, for face to face in the moonlight he was confronted by the ghostly form of a tall grey horse, regarding him with a sleepy air of wonder and astonishment.

The O'Connor was no fool. Not only did he instantly recognise in the horse before him 'Grey Somnus,'—winner of the Irish Grand Military, and property of Captain Valentine Bourke from out of the

West,—but he also perceived that, attached to the saddle on the horse's back, was a straw pillion, such as were still even then in common use amongst the lower classes in out-of-the-way districts of Ireland, for conveying their female relatives to mass or elsewhere.

Faster than he had moved for years did the O'Connor take to his heels and run. A high wall intervened between the garden where he was and the old house itself, and perforce he had to go nearly five hundred yards round before he gained the stone steps leading up to the entrance door, and burst breathlessly into the big drawing-room, where he had left all his guests in peaceable assembly.

A piercing wail fell on his ear as the door opened wide, and on the floor lay his

first cousin twice removed, Misthress Judy O'Connor, in violent hysterics, surrounded by a crowd of sobbing and sympathising female relatives, whilst the men of the party stood in the background with wonder and consternation depicted on their countenances.

‘Ah! wirra wirra, that it should be me to see it!’ moaned Misthress Judy, in a mixture of pride and distress. ‘It’s to few it’s given to see the Banshee with their own blessed eyes, though many’s the toime I’ve heard the crathur’ cryin’ an’ sobbin’ the live-long noight! Ah, it’s yerself O’Connor that’s come at the right toime,—for I tell ye I see’d the figure of a weany woman in gray lookin’ in at yonder window, an’ I saw her meself wringin’ her hands an’ cryin’ sore, an’ wavin’ her long

white arms to the doomed house. Ah, me God, me God, but it's a fearfu' thing to have seen the Banshee! Is there a dhrop of whiskey goin' ?'

'Hould yer tongue, with yer sperrits and yer caterwaulin'!' roared the exasperated O'Connor. 'It's just flesh and blood ye saw, and no Banshee! It was my daughter Eila, an' she's away with that young scoundrel Valentine Bourke. But we'll catch her yet, man!' he added, turning to address the petrified drysalter, —'tho' that grey harse may be the best baste in all the West, he'll have a double burthen on his back now, and they've a good thirty mile to go afore they can reach a station or train. Wake up, man! Aren't ye goin' to make a fight for yer own rights, at all, at all ?'

'I've no riding things with me,' murmured Mr. Joseph Stubbs, turning ashy pale.

'What matther? Shure ye can ride as ye are! Boys,' added the old man solemnly, turning to the uncles, cousins, nephews, who stood around,—'ye'll help me to give the sthranger fair play?' and a loud murmur of assent ran round the assembly.

Then was there hurrying and mounting in hot haste, every O'Connor and every Bourke on whatever beast had brought him there,—from the old blind car-horse which dragged Misthress Judy to chapel on Sundays, to the young four-year-old 'blood horse' belonging to the priest, on which a stalwart squireen was now 'leatherin' along,' to use his own expression.

Even the O'Connor was there, mounted on the 'wee mare,' his long legs almost touching the ground, as he urged the active little galloway down the avenue at a wild gallop. And Master Cornelius, hidden in an adjacent grove of trees, laughed aloud with scorn and delight as he surveyed the motley group of avengers, and held up in the bright moonlight the glittering piece of gold with which Valentine Bourke had repaid him for his most useful assistance as general scout, whereby a successful flight had been secured.

At break-neck pace the cavalcade rode, for as they rose the crest of the first long hill, they could distinctly see in front of them a grey horse galloping along at leisure, carrying a strange-looking bur-

den on his back, *i.e.* Captain Valentine Bourke and the maiden of his choice.

‘There he is! we’ll catch him yet!’ arose the cry. And in wild excitement they hurried along,—stones flying, hats coming off, bridles breaking, saddles slipping; but all intent on the exciting chase.

The moon shines placidly on the steep crest of a hill, covered with huge grey rocks that stand out ghostly and weird in her cold, pale light. Ere the crest of that hill is gained and passed, two out of the drysalter’s avengers are grovelling on the ground, the girths of one having given way, the horse of another.

‘I think this is highly dangerous,’ murmured Mr. Stubbs to himself in a deprecating whisper, for he dared show no lack of zeal in the chase when surrounded by

this band of infuriated kinsmen. 'And this dreadful cob shakes my bones out of my skin, and dress-trousers are so thin, too. Oh, Lord, how I wish I'd never set foot in this accursed land, but had married Jane Jones, and was living in a snug villa on Hampstead Heath, and in bed at this minute!' moaned the miserable drysalter.

'Misther Stubbs,' said the O'Connor, suddenly reining up alongside, 'my wee mare's bate entoirely, an' I can go no farther. But, shure, the boys will be afther seein' ye righted, an' whin they bring me back me darter ye shall have yer wife, man!'

'I think I'd almost sooner *not*,' said the great Joseph with sudden firmness.

'Why, man, shure ye're not afraid of the colleen because she's got just a wee

bit of sperrit? Many's the good woman with a spice of the divil in her, I can tell ye. The question is: Do ye like it, or do ye not?'

'Do you know, I almost think *not*,' repeated the drysalter deprecatingly.

'Then there's no more to say, an' we may as well all go home,' said the O'Connor. 'There's not a sthretch left in any of the harses, bar his Riverence's blood four-year-ould, an' sorra the like o' even him could see the way that big grey went,' added the old man in unwilling admiration.

On the crest of a hill they all pull up, horses panting and steaming, men cursing and laughing,—one and all defeated by the clever strategy of a modern young Lochinvar. And far away in the dis-

tance, on the direct road to a railway junction, from whence the very latest passengers can reach Queenstown Harbour to catch the American mail steamer even now waiting to sail at dawn, a far-off white speck can still be seen moving steadily on,—the good grey horse who for the second time this week has won the day for his master.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DREAM OF 'A DAY THAT IS DEAD.'

'We had stood as the sure stars stand, and moved
As the moon moves, loving the world ; and seen
Grief collapse as a thing disproved,
Death consume as a thing unclean.
Twain halves of a perfect heart, made fast
Soul to soul while the years fell past ;
Had you loved me once, as you have not loved ;
Had the chance been with us that has not been.

* * * * *

I had grown pure as the dawn and the dew,
You had grown strong as the sun or the sea.
But none shall triumph a whole life through :
For death is one, and the fates are three.
At the door of life, by the gate of breath,
There are worse things waiting for men than death ;
Death could not sever my soul and you,
As these have severed your soul from me.'

The Triumph of Time.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LONG, desolate-looking causeway built of dull gray granite, stretching far out into the sea, and washed by a mass of dreary angry waters, which throw themselves sullenly against the cold grey stones, under a leaden-hued sky, do not altogether combine to make a cheerful picture, or one whereon the eye can rest with much satisfaction.

And yet it is more than an hour now since Helen Vansittart has been sitting on an extremely uncomfortable rock at the farthest extremity of the pier which

so securely guards the eastern side of the harbour of Kingstown, Ireland, watching anxiously, watching ceaselessly, for the first glimpse of the English mail steamer which daily and nightly crosses the silver streak dividing Great Britain from Erin, and which on this particular evening is unquestionably a little behind time.

A perfect hurricane of storm and rain, accompanying a strong north-westerly gale, had been raging nearly all day, and though close under the lee of the pier the sea was forced to subside into a restless swelling and heaving of its angry waters, far out at sea could be seen ominous white crests of foam, and driving masses of dark grey clouds, which told their own tale plainly enough.

And yet even those dreary storm-tossed waters gave less evidence of the storm which had passed o'er them than did the face of the woman who sat watching on the rock, and over whose soul a far greater tempest had surely passed! Her dark eyes scanned the horizon with a wild fierce eagerness that told of a vehement and reckless nature,—the marvellously beautiful face, contracted into a wrathful expression of savage despair, brought to mind the vision of some evil spirit 'dreeing its doom' on a rock in the ocean of eternity,—and her hands clenched themselves cruelly and sharply with each wild thought that passed through her mind and soul, as though in hope that physical pain might still even mental torture.

Beautiful Helen Vansittart has some

cause to feel the rages of wrath and the pangs of sorrow on this same summer afternoon,—for a chain, forged link by link of the several passions of love, desolation, and revenge, is hanging around her neck, too heavy for her to bear. That it is a man's hand which has hung it there goes without saying,—for the heaviest chains which each sex has to bear in this world of ours are generally forged by the opposite one.

Helen's had been a glorious golden chain when the first few links were forged,—so bright and light that she could scarce feel it,—and the hand which clasped it round her neck had been that of her cousin and her first true love, Horace Stuart; but the game which had been begun in play, soon grew to be played in sad and bitter earnest; the man woke up

to a sense of his folly in meddling with edged tools,—the girl realised too surely that the 'stricken deer' may e'en go weep, for 'the hart ungalled plays.'

The daughter of a West India planter—with Creole blood in his veins, very little money in his pocket, and of a reckless, hard-drinking, devil-may-care character to boot—poor Helen had as yet had little chance in the world when, at the age of two-and-twenty, she met for the first time in her life a clever charming man of the world, in the shape of her relative Sir Horace Stuart. He, on his side, was amazed at the marvellous beauty of this newly-found cousin,—with whom he had casually made acquaintance during a fishing tour in Ireland; for Mr. Vansittart, having drunk more than enough of Jamaica

rum, thought he would try fresh fields and pastures new in the shape of Irish whiskey for a change, and so had transported himself, his disreputable fortunes, and his handsome daughter, to that happy wet country.

Sir Horace found his little flirtation so much to his liking that week after week saw him dancing attendance on the fair Helen at all the second-rate balls and doubtful dinners to which Mr. Vansittart's social standing admitted his daughter and himself. 'No one will ever know it,' the astute young diplomat had thought to himself, serenely conscious that it would be most unlikely that he should meet any of his own friends and acquaintances amongst the Vansittart's disreputable set.

Unfortunately, even the cleverest people

make wrong reckonings at times, and the only thing which Sir Horace had never dreamt of came to pass, *i.e.* an indiscreet friend, one of his own carefully-selected circle of acquaintances, met him escorting his cousin to some trivial outdoor *fête* one day, and being an intelligent individual drew his own conclusions from this fact,—for Horace Stuart was *not* the man to cultivate innocent joys and recreations for no reason.

Before another week was out half London knew that the clever, good-looking young *attaché*,—heir to his uncle David Stuart's property of Heron's Chase, Fennshire,—was caught in the toils of a beautiful siren of doubtful antecedents, relation though she might be.

Mothers, with daughters to marry, ground

and gnashed their teeth ; daughters, with mothers anxious to marry them, sighed softly and sadly o'er their vanished hopes. But one irate matron, the mother of many, took her heart in her hand and went straight without more ado to old David Stuart of Heron's Chase, and told him the tale of his nephew's infatuation. And so a letter crossed the sea to Ireland that very night, bidding the culprit choose betwixt his lovely cousin and his rich inheritance,—and the culprit did not hesitate to choose the latter.

To do Sir Horace justice, he had no more idea of the wild, fierce love on Helen's part, of which he was the object, than the moon 'which sees so many brooks,' can have of the brook which 'sees but one moon.' And so, when the time

came 'to say farewell and go,' he was amazed and honestly grieved at the vehemence of poor Helen's sorrow, and the bitter truth of her agonised upbraidings. 'Who would have thought the girl was such a fool!' he murmured to himself distractedly, when she laid her tear-stained face on his breast and clung to him with the wild energy of despair, and with the hopeless cry: 'For God's sake, don't forsake me!' on her lips. But Helen was only a woman, and there were already so many of those in this world, whereas Heron's Chase stood unrivalled.

Therefore Sir Horace remained very firm in the midst of his sorrow, and even refrained from selfishly adding an unnecessary pang to her half-broken heart by intimating that he too was suffering sorely ;

and contented himself with a few commonplace untruths, such as are coined on those occasions freely. And Helen, though she loved not wisely but too well, had inherited that curse of the weaker sex, fidelity, in all its bitter strength; and so she never for an instant doubted his assurances that 'he would come back to her,' would 'write daily, nay hourly,' would 'never marry any other woman so long as they both should live,' but let him go from her, lovingly and trustingly to the last.

Then came a long, weary time, during which Helen's head was carried as high as ever,—followed by a still wearier one, during which her heart sank, and the handsome head fell low; and then came a charmingly written letter, full of kind and

cousinly affection, which laid before her the wisdom and propriety of their both 'trying to get over it.'

All that was good in Helen Vansittart died that night. Her vehement, reckless nature knew no medium,—she could have been made one of the noblest creatures on God's earth by the hand of the man she loved, but that hand had struck her down instead of helping her, and all hope for her was gone.

Years passed by,—three or four years of patient waiting, silent raging, and vehement efforts to forget the past,—that past which died so hard and *would* not be forgotten! Then fresh suitors came to the fore, but at first were each and all dismissed with a most curt dismissal; for the remnant of honesty and purity left in

Helen's heart cried shame on the sacrilege to the one great love of her life.

But the Vansittart fortunes sank lower and lower ; her drunken old father grew more and more imbecile with every sun that set,—her home more miserable, her friends more cold, her enemies warmer,—and when old Sir Joshua Kirkpatrick, knight, laid his gouty body and soul, but also his healthy redundant purse, at the feet of the beautiful pauper, small wonder was it that the inflated little knight assumed almost the position of an intervening providence.

To his surprise Miss Vansittart asked for 'a few days to reflect upon it.' But conscious of his golden merit, he consented to the delay with pompous magnanimity. Perhaps, had he known the reason which

prompted her request, had he read the letter which was borne o'er the waves that night, he might not have felt so happily secure that merit will have its dues.

It is the answer to that letter for which Helen Vansittart is waiting now; and as on the far horizon the dark smoke of an advancing steamer becomes distinctly visible at last, she clasps her hands and half rises from her seat with a look of passionate eager hope on her gloriously beautiful face,—a look which never again in life would there be read.

As if in accordance with that bright hope the clouds suddenly lifted and the evening sun shone forth in all its glory,—cresting each wave with gold now, instead of silver, and bringing a gleam of gladness over sea and shore.

‘Will he come?’ It was the old, old cry, the old, old story! Poor Helen was no better and no wiser than the many women who had gone before her, and, like them, she must e’en face her doom.

More beautiful than ever she looked as, rising slowly from her resting-place, she stood there for one instant gazing intently seaward, the red light of the setting sun shining on her dark hair, her vivid southern colouring, and her graceful rounded figure. The next minute she had sprung down the stone steps which led from the rocks to the pier below, and was making all haste to return from whence she came, so as to be in readiness to meet the incoming steamer, when the latter should arrive at the usual landing-stage known by the name of Carlisle Pier.

Years after, when nearly all else was forgotten, Helen Vansittart remembered vividly that one short walk. The beautiful hill of Killiney, lit up with golden sunshine as if on fire, the purple Wicklow mountains in the dim and hazy distance, the white houses and hotels of the town which lay before her,—above all, the hope in her heart and the wild longing in her soul.

The 'boat train,' as it emerged from a tunnel under the road beside her, makes her start nervously and hurry on for fear she should be late in seeing the loved one's face,—late to clasp the loved one's hand. But there is yet time, for the steamer is only now rounding the pier-head, her paddle-wheels revolving slower and slower as she nears the haven where she would be.

Hastily and keenly Helen scans the decks from end to end, as the vessel fast approaches. She sees the white spray crusted high on the steamer's black funnels, telling of stress of wind and weather, and notes how wet her 'hurricane deck' looks even now. She sees the captain standing above with hand uplifted, and can hear his voice giving his final order for the day,—even the captain's big black dog standing on the paddle-box and looking anxiously for the gangway to be lowered so that he may leap upon it and hurry on to shore, does not escape her steady, searching glance. But amongst all the crowd of human beings who follow hurriedly on that black dog's footsteps is there no single face she knows,—and it is with a mighty effort that, when the very

last soul has left the ship and the mail train has steamed slowly off,—she steadies herself to walk calmly and quietly back to the miserable little house in George Street, which is all that she can call home.

A dull sense of all being over, all hope dead, is clouding her brain,—and yet there is one chance more, even one, and her eyes shine with fierce eagerness again as she remembers that the English mail is in, and the letters will be delivered before her own to Sir Joshua must be posted.

Mr. Vansittart is not at home, and so his reckless, miserable daughter can rage up and down the room like a maddened tigress to her heart's content. But pitiful are the wild eager glances she gives out of the window every now and then, as minute after minute passes by and still

there is no sign of the familiar postman's knock.

At last it comes. She flies to the door and opens it, and the smart young official with the post-bag starts back at the sight of her haggard face in its deathly paleness. But the door is closed again in a moment, and Helen sinks down on the nearest chair she can find, with a letter in her hand, upon the familiar superscription of which she lays her lips with passionate vehemence.

Ere another five minutes have passed and gone that letter is open,—but from Helen's heart all peace for evermore is shut.

CHAPTER IX.

A DREAM OF WEDDING BELLS.

“ Pour moi le mal, c'est de craindre l'opinion des gens qu'on méprise, c'est de pratiquer ce qu'on ne croit pas, c'est de se courber sous des préjugés et sous des fantômes dont on connaît le néant ; le mal, c'est d'être esclave ou hypocrite, comme les trois quarts et demi du monde ; le mal, c'est la laideur, l'ignorance, la sottise, et la lâcheté. Le bien, c'est la beauté, le talent, la science, et la courage. . . . Voilà tout ! ”

“ Et Dieu ? ” dit-elle.

Octave Feuillet.

CHAPTER IX.

THERE are tides in the affairs of men when strange things come to pass; and such an one was very near to Horace Stuart even now. He was, perhaps, the very last man in the world whom his friends would suspect of doing an unselfish deed,—he was certainly the very last man on earth whom his enemies dared to hope might do a foolish one,—and yet he had done both. No man of his set had been so grimly sarcastic over the social downfall of a fellow-man, if the latter were brought about by the hand of a woman ;

and yet, ere the Sabbath bells rang out from the little mountain kirk once more, he had calmly and deliberately asked the mountain maiden, Elsie Græme, to be his wife.

How things had arrived at this point he could scarce have told himself; but the 'lotus-eating life' of the past few weeks had cast its spell upon him. The great dissimilarity between such a nature as Elsie's and those of the many other women he had met and loved and left, long ere this, gave her a strange and unconscious power over him, simply because she was the first and only woman whom he had ever respected as well as loved. And though he was too shallow of soul to gauge the marvellous strength of passionate tenderness which had sprung

up in her heart, or to read aright the depth of faith which shone out from her honest eyes, he vaguely realised that here indeed was a rare and noble heart, and of a certainty that heart must be his.

When he should marry her, *where* he should marry her, *why* he should marry her, were problems as yet unsolved. It was needless to look his folly in the face, now that the deed was done. He thought there would be time enough for that by and by, when the bright summer sunshine was clouded over, and romance became reality. At present it was far happier and more comfortable to drift down the stream without an effort; and it was so seldom that any of his dreams of pleasure lasted, somehow, why not make sure of this one at least?

‘Come out for a walk, Elsie, child,’ said Sir Horace, suddenly interrupting his unpleasant thoughts and vague misgivings to look at her sweet fair face, which had the power to chase away every dark and evil thought, as a heathery breeze can clear and lift away a dreary mountain mist.

‘Just one instant more?’ pleaded Elsie in answer, turning her bright face towards him with a radiantly happy laugh. ‘I’ve only got one tiny bit more to do to my Guinevere’s nose, and then my painting hours will be over for the day. But at present it is “tip-tilting” (as you called it yesterday) to an alarming extent, and I’d fain make it all fair before I give it up,—if I may?’ she added shyly.

‘You shall have the required permis-

sion this once, my child,' said Sir Horace, leaning over her to smooth back a stray tress of chestnut hair which offended his critical eye sadly.

But Elsie only recognised tenderness in the careless touch of his hand, and smiled up brightly at him as she resumed her work once more ; whilst he sauntered to the fire and began absently to kick the logs which were burning upon it, until the sparks flew upwards to heaven, even like the troubles which man is born to.

A little while later and both the man and maiden have passed up the steep rugged path which Sir Horace had toiled along so wearily on the night when first they met, and under the warm shelter of the pine-wood crowning the summit of the

hill they sat down on a comfortable bank of heather and thyme, close to the softly murmuring waters of Carra Force.

‘This pet spot of yours is a rather eerie - looking place, Elsie!’ observed Horace Stuart laughingly; ‘and it cannot boast of a very inviting name either, if I remember right?’

‘They call it “Dead Man’s Shaw,”’ answered his companion dreamily.

‘Perhaps this is the very spot where those unpleasantly energetic gentlemen called “Stout Willimondswick” and “Hard-riding Dick,” etc., were supposed to

“Have set on Sir Albany Featherstonhaugh,
And taken his life at the Deadman’s-shaw.”’

‘Ay, those were times to live in!’ exclaimed Elsie Græme, her grey eyes shining with excitement. ‘When the

beacons blazing on every hill woke men up to do men's work, when every man knew friend from foe, and when might made right, it was a fairer and honester world then than it is now, perhaps !'

'Possibly.' Sir Horace felt little sympathy with those olden times, when men were valued by what they did, not by what they seemed.

'Sometimes, when I've been sitting here lonesome and quiet,' went on Elsie eagerly, 'it was just as if I could see it all coming back once more ! The mist on that mountain there made the pine-trees look like men on horses moving slowly down through the pass; and there's many a shepherd lad will tell you that at times may be heard the sound of clashing armour and clanking sword-thrusts, and

high above all the rallying cry of a "Home," a "Douglas," an "Elliott," or a "Græme."

'All superstition, my dear child, nothing else. Unless a little Scotch whiskey were by chance added to the wild waters of Carra Force, which I imagine to be the foundation on which all those eerie sounds are probably built.'

'Maybe so,' answered Elsie simply, willing to let even the happiest dreams of her monotonous life be torn aside by his hand.

'I can put into your head far more beautiful ideas anent your favourite mountain, Elsie, than those connected with the wild Border times,' pursued Sir Horace, watching her eager face gravely. 'There is a certain well-known poem called

“Ænone,”—dealing with a lovely nymph, a pine-crowned mountain, a waterfall, and a young man,—which, when I read it to you, will conjure up far more entrancing visions than murderous Border forays and moonlight raids upon sheep and cattle. They were only gentlemanly robbers, those mail-clad heroes of yours, my dear child, after all!’

‘And your hero,—did *he* never “lift” anything?’ queried Elsie doubtingly, for she was wont to gloss over this small weakness with perfect good faith, fostered by endless Border legends of somewhat quaint morality.

‘Well, I’m afraid he “lifted” a young woman, as you express it,’ replied Sir Horace smiling.

‘And why? Was she no’ pleased to go

with him ?' asked Elsie, eager for the story.

'Oh ! yes,—she'd have followed him to the world's end with the pertinacity of her sex, no doubt,' rejoined Horace Stuart carelessly. 'But you see, after he had robbed her of her heart, he went away and forsook her for a newer and more beautiful love, and she was left behind lamenting, all alone.'

'He was a coward, your fine hero !' said Elsie shortly. Something in the story seemed to strike her unpleasantly, as when some one walks over one's grave and causes a shiver.

'What would *you* have done had you been in the place of the forsaken nymph CEnone ?' asked Sir Horace, in lazy amusement.

‘Done?’ echoed Elsie Græme, in a tone of withering scorn,—‘I’d have done what many a Græme has done before me! I’d have tracked him night and day, through far and near,—ay, till my back was bowed and my hair turned white,—but I’d have had my vengeance at last!’ and the fierce passion in Elsie’s eyes blazed like a consuming fire.

‘And your vengeance,’—said her lover’s low tones in her ear, as he laid one hand on her shoulder caressingly,—‘what would that be, *ma belle*?’

The fierceness died out of Elsie Græme’s eyes, and a marvellous loving tenderness took its place, as, laying her soft cheek down on the so dearly-loved hand, she murmured in a strangely changed tone: ‘Only forgiveness, for ever and aye!’

Horace Stuart looked at her long and curiously,—then, taking her face between his two hands and forcing her eyes to meet his, he said, with deep earnestness :

‘ If your future life were to prove less happy than you thought, Elsie,—if you were to learn through me what suffering means,—I should never forgive myself, even though you should forgive me till seventy times seven !’

Perhaps for the first time since they have known each other has Sir Horace touched the right cord and won his way to Elsie’s heart at last. The first purely unselfish words he has ever spoken strike home to her noble generous nature just as a miner’s stroke discovers gold.

‘ Listen to me,’ she says, in a tone of deeply concentrated feeling, that enables

her hearer to realise how little he even yet has gauged her inmost soul,—‘were you to go away and leave me, were you to break my heart, were you to kill me with sair, sair pain,—there’s nothing, *nothing* of it all I would not forgive! And if the dark day came that I woke to find I was doing you harm instead o’ good,—if I thought I had dragged you down in this world, or made it harder for you to gain the world to come,—there’s no pain on this earth, there’s no torments o’ hell, would be sufficient punishment to atone for it!’

The reckless passion in Elsie Græme’s voice suddenly breaks and changes as she adds: ‘But ere that day came, all sorrow that I could bring you would have ceased with me.’

‘Elsie, darling! What do you mean?’

How could sorrow come to me through you? My own one, you don't know, you never can know, all the good you have done me! As yet I never cared for any one or anything, save my own pleasure; I have never done anything that I ought to do,—not a soul in this wide world has ever been the better for knowing me,—some have been the worse. With *you* I feel not only utter peace and rest, but an odd feeling as if I too might some day live a better and nobler life than I ever did as yet,—don't take this hope from me!

If it were acting, it was done well,—but in good truth Sir Horace found himself strangely in earnest now, and it seemed to him almost as if the whole fair brightness of his future life lay in this one woman's hands.

‘If you have any fear for your own happiness,’ he went on, in the low sweet voice that had power to stir his listener’s very heart and soul, ‘say so, darling, before it is too late! I would sooner even lose you, my heart’s life, than cause you one pang of sorrow hereafter! Won’t you trust me, even as I trust you, without one ray of fear?’

‘I know not fear,’ answered Elsie simply.

‘Then let us leave all these unpleasant and tragical woes alone until they come, my darling; and as I hope that will never be, we’ll just forget that there is such a thing in the world as either sorrow or separation. With your dear head lying close to me, and your hand in mine, I defy them one and all!’

Elsie Græme smiled brightly as she

listened to his clear, decisive words, and the ray of warm sunlight shining on her face seemed to reach her very heart.

‘Tell me more about yourself and your home,’ she said in a tone of quiet contentment, as she nestled closer to his side. ‘It won’t be as wild and free as this beautiful North, I know; but I mean to like it best for all that.’

The thought of his home, beautiful Heron’s Chase, with its grand old towers and stately terraces, had a sudden and saddening effect upon Sir Horace, for with it there seemed wafted to him a breath of the old life, with all its pain and pleasure and sin,—a life which he meant to put away from him for ever.

A vision rose before him of the last time he had stood in those terraced gar-

dens, wherein a large, if somewhat indiscriminate, circle of guests were noisily disporting themselves,—and the memory of a woman's smile haunted him strangely. Would the new life of quiet domestic bliss equal in happiness the fascinating brightness and carelessness of those days gone by? Would he never regret the latter, never find that the world had grown strangely grey and tame? Would the future efface the past? or would the memory of 'the days that are no more' blot out all hope of happier ones to come?

Elsie's voice broke into his thoughts as she once again asked a question about her future home, and Sir Horace roused himself from his reflections with a start. But, instead of replying to her words at once, he suddenly said :

‘I wish I had done my duty better by the old home than I have done it as yet;’ and the wistful regret in his tone sounded something quite strange and new even to himself. ‘Elsie, you must take me in hand and bring me up the way I should go, for I fear that as yet I’ve not only done many a thing I ought not to have done, but have left even more things utterly undone.’

Elsie’s only answer was a grave and somewhat incredulous look at his face, and Sir Horace continued dreamily:

‘So many things in this world depend upon how much chance we have had given us! It’s easy to know that we must do this thing, but that thing we must not do,—that the ten commandments are not to be broken more than can be helped; but what all comes easy to one man may be a

Sisyphus-like task to another. And what may to one soul seem an open pitfall, gladly shunned and easily avoided, may to another seem a sunny path leading to pleasure and life, and finally to destruction. However, so long as one keeps a fairly straight line, I suppose that will do for this earth !'

'And heaven ?' asked Elsie gravely.

'Ah, that's beyond me, dear one. I find one world gives me quite trouble enough at a time ; for the rest, who can say ? But come, it's time we were moving home again, for I have a very important piece of conversation to inflict on your father before the day is out, else I shall not leave here to-morrow in a properly satisfied frame of mind, I can tell you !'

'Poor old father, how he'll miss me

when I'm gone,' sighed Elsie sadly, as she rose from the ground and slipped her hand confidentially and happily through her lover's arm.

'Yes, but it must be so.' Sir Horace spoke with an amount of decision hardly called for, as if he intended the separation between father and daughter to be something more than an ordinary one. In his heart he had made up his mind that his wife should at once be removed from all her surroundings, and the sooner the better, so he added :

'I shall go to my lawyer's the minute I arrive in town the day after to-morrow, and get everything settled (forgetting neither license nor ring), and in about a fortnight at farthest you will see me back here, Elsie. That's not too soon

for you, darling, is it? But I shall never be happy till I have got you safe,—“to have and to hold” as long as I can.’

“To have and to hold until death shall us part,” murmured Elsie, in a half fearful tone. ‘Horace, I feel afraid of those words, somehow, they sound like a defiance.’

‘You’re getting superstitious again, my child! Don’t worry your head on so very unsatisfactory a subject,—but trust me, it shall indeed be some marvellous and supernatural power that shall wrest you from me when once you are *mine!*’

And Sir Horace’s tone of mingled scorn and tenderness rang out defiantly on the still autumn air, echoed back in mockery by the fierce laughing waters of Carra Force.

CHAPTER X.

THE FACE OF AN OLD LOVE.

‘ You have chosen and clung to the chance they sent you,
Life sweet as perfume and pure as prayer.
But will it not one day in heaven repent you ?
Will they solace you wholly, the days that were ?
Will you lift up your eyes between sadness and bliss,
Meet mine, and see where the great love is,
And tremble and turn and be changed ? Content you ;
The gate is straight ; I shall not be there.

‘ But you, had you chosen, had you stretched hand,
Had you seen good such a thing were done,
I too might have stood with the souls that stand
In the sun’s sight, clothed with the light of the sun ;
But who now on earth need care how I live ?
Have the high gods anything left to give,
Save dust and laurels, and gold, and sand ?
Which gifts are goodly ; but I will none.’

The Triumph of Time.

CHAPTER X.

‘ARE you going to cut me, Helen?’ said a quiet familiar voice in Lady Kirkpatrick’s ear, as she sauntered slowly down the platform of King’s Cross Station this September afternoon, followed by her French maid, laden with all the luxurious necessities without which the former fastidious lady could not pretend to travel in comfort.

The quick start and the involuntary blush which rose to Helen Kirkpatrick’s cheek, told a tale very gratifying to the vanity of the man whose keen eyes were noting each detail of her marvellous beauty,

to which the years that had intervened since last they met had only given a new and strange fascination.

Very different to the shabbily-dressed beauty of long ago, was the glorious 'fair Helen' of to-day! Let moralists prose as they will, a good-looking woman can always be made better looking still by the wearing of those fine feathers which so often have alone the credit of making fine birds,—and Lady Kirkpatrick was no exception to the rule. The rounded *svelte* figure, which had seemed almost too full for elegance when compressed into an ill-fitting scanty cotton gown, seemed now the incarnation of voluptuous grace, arrayed in a gorgeously-broidered black and gold 'combination' that would have severely tried any type of beauty less faultless than

her own, but which seemed only a fitting golden frame to the picture made by her rich southern colouring. The dark hair,—which in the days of long ago had always a knack of looking untidy from its very thickness and heaviness, which set hairpins at defiance,—now lay close to her handsome head in carefully-braided tresses, guiltless of even one rebellious curl ; and the beautiful face, which in those days also had so often been marred by a look of haggard anxiety or bitter contempt, now wore an expression of haughty confidence in its own incomparable loveliness, and a provokingly cool defiance of either nauseous flattery or jealous criticism.

‘Of course you are going to Doncaster ?’ inquired Lady Kirkpatrick calmly, having recovered from the temporary embarrass-

ment, which she had inwardly fiercely cursed in her proud heart, and resolved never to be startled into betraying again.

‘Yes,—and you?’ answered Sir Horace Stuart, thinking, man-like, how wonderfully her beauty was enhanced by the vivid blush which she had blushed for *him*.

‘I too am going. It’s the nicest race-meeting of the year, I think, especially when a kind fate has provided one with a pleasant house to stay in, and an especially pleasant party in it.’

‘You are in luck,’ answered Sir Horace, rather shortly. Somehow, though his cousin and her affairs could no longer be any serious concern of his, he did not quite like the idea that they might become the concern of some one else, which the rich dower left to the defunct Sir

Joshua's beautiful widow made only too probable.

By this time the northern express was fairly on its way, and no other passengers having entered the compartment Sir Horace pulled out his cigarette case with the careless remark :

‘ I know you don't object to smoking, Helen ? ’

‘ No, ’—and the strange abrupt tone made her hearer start. The memory of when and how he had learnt his knowledge stung her to the quick ; but she was no fool now, she bitterly told herself, and such memories must be erased as both childish and useless.

After a somewhat awkward silence Sir Horace's *savoir faire* came to the rescue, and the conversation drifted into

ordinary channels, maintained on both sides with the confidence and ease inseparable from two people who know each other well, no matter what the circumstances are which lie between them.

So the afternoon wore pleasantly on, and the golden rays of sunset lit up the wild moorland country through which the train now bent its way, casting deep shadows on every little laughing valley, and on each light-hearted beck as it wended its way down to the far North Sea.

Sir Horace was reading a paper, or thought he was; whilst his companion, who made no pretence at interest in the *Society Journal* lying on her lap, leaned back in the opposite corner and stared steadily out of window for a good

half-hour without moving, whilst an odd medley of thoughts passed before her mind like the alternating colours of a kaleidoscope—now grave, now gay, now bright, now sombre.

Were they really so long ago, those days that were? The miserable, disreputable life, the drunken father, the poverty which pinches, the shame which stings! And yet what happiness was hers, what joy reigned in her heart during the one bright year of her young life when love gave its own sweet colouring to all around, making darkness into light! ‘Ah, yes! that was a happy time enough,’ murmured Helen to herself, a quiet smile softening her face for a moment, like a ray of sunlight shining o’er dark waters. ‘But the end?’ and

her lips are sternly compressed once more, and a hard, reckless look crosses her face as she ponders on the bitter end which followed on that bright beginning.

Once again she sees her old self clinging passionately to the man she loved,—can almost hear again her own cry of misery and despair, and realises to her heart's core the weary anguish of the long, sad years which followed that terrible time of agony and sorrow. Then the colours change once more from grave to gay, and she sees the vision of a girl sitting on a rock by the sea, watching earnestly, watching confidently, for the hope that never came! Again the wheel goes round, and now the colour of her thoughts is dark as Erebus itself. That girl with the eager, hopeful face is grop-

ing her way dumbly to the light,—black despair in her heart, the numbness of misery in her brain, no ray of hope to lighten her desolate soul. And *he*, the traitorous lover who had wrought this bitter woe, had no vengeance descended upon his head,—no life-long sorrow to mar his ill-gained prosperity? Had she alone been the sufferer and he the gainer throughout?

‘Helen, will you answer me a question, dear?’ and surely the tone in which Sir Horace speaks is the voice of her lover of long ago?

‘Yes, *anything*,’ is the low passionate reply.

‘Were you happy with him—with Sir Joshua, I mean?’

‘*Never!* not for a day, not for a single hour!’ is the vehement response.

‘I am glad.’ And in spite of its selfishness Helen treasures the jealous words hungrily. ‘I couldn’t bear to think that the woman I once loved so well, and from whom circumstances alone had parted me, should so soon have learnt to love my successor, Helen;’ and Sir Horace’s cold grey eyes light dangerously under the charm of the situation, and his hand grasps hers with more than cousinly fervour.

Faster and faster the wild moorlands fly beside them,—the sun has set now, and a dreary desolation reigns over all. But in Helen Kirkpatrick’s heart there is light and peace at last, and her glorious dark eyes have in their depths the faith of a child.

‘How lovely you are, Helen!’ con-

tinues the soft, low voice which erstwhile had wreaked such misery on her soul ; and perhaps for the first time in her life did she value her pride of beauty truly.

‘Don’t make me more conceited than I am, Horace,’ is her laughing reply. And she wonders why the mists of evening should feel so chill, and the clouds look so dark and drear, when she herself could sing aloud for joy !

To be near a very beautiful woman, and not to be more or less under the influence of her beauty, was simply impossible to a man of Sir Horace Stuart’s type ; and yet he never for one instant dreamt that either she or he ran the slightest danger of finding that the game which had been begun so lightly, and on his side merely to while away the

hours of a tedious afternoon, would ever be played out in grim and bitter earnest. Only it was so pleasant to realise that this lovely woman was his very own cousin,—quite a near relation, in fact,—obviously possessing great claims on his courtesy and his cousinly affection. So his words were very soft, and his eyes very kind and loving; and he pressed Helen's hand with a mighty sympathy, whilst she recounted the short and sad experiences of her miserable married life.

‘And now tell me of *your* life, Horace,’ she besought eagerly, when her own tale was done. How she longed to enter into his existence once more,—to share his joys, which had always been so many,—to bear his sorrows, which had always been so few!

Without a shadow of hesitation he tells her all. How his uncle's death has made him master of Heron's Chase at last ; how grandly beautiful is the fine old place ; how little he himself has done as yet to prove himself worthy of such an inheritance.

‘ But all that is over now, Helen, for better times are coming both for me and for the old place, I hope ! God knows I’ve wasted quite enough of my life already, for I’m nearly mid-way across the space of “ threescore years and ten,” and have nothing to show for it.’

‘ And what is to bring about this wonderful reformation, Horace ?’ almost whispers his cousin, stealing a little beseeching white hand into his.

But no answering pressure reassures

her,—no words of passion fall on her ear,—only the sentence that speaks her doom, said in low, almost reverent tones :

‘The love of a good woman, dear.’

Helen Kirkpatrick’s cheek grew white as death. ‘A *good* woman,’ he had said,—that could not be herself! Ah, then, it was all in vain that she had let this old wild infatuation grasp her heart again with even fiercer power than before,—in vain that she had let him see into her very soul, and read the bitter truth so easy to be read! Why must she be condemned to perpetual pain and suffering, she wonders drearily? Others have sorrows to bear, and often untold miseries to face, but there are few lives in this world so hopelessly sad as never to be conscious of *one* golden gleam during all their long lifetime of

sorrow. And it was so little she longed for ! Only the love of this one man,—not a good man either, nor a great one,—but just all in all to her.

With the wonderful strength of self-command that is hers, Helen Kirkpatrick leaves her hand lying passively in her cousin's grasp, and gives no sign of the dire misery now raging in her heart. Save that the small white hand is cold as ice, nothing strange can be detected in its owner's demeanour ; for Helen's calmness is that greatest of all,—the calmness of despair. And so Sir Horace,—as he gazes dreamily out of window, and continues his confidential moralisings, and draws entrancing pictures of a golden future with one woman,—quite fails to see that he is darkening and blurring the sunshine of life

for another. And he claims his cousin's sympathy freely in all his plans, reiterating the fascination which a quiet life with such a companion as Elsie Græme must surely have for him now, and driving fresh dagger strokes into his listener's heart with each sentence he utters ; for unconsciously he dwells fondly on the contrast between his true-hearted Northern lassie and the fashionable women of the world, which is his cousin's and his own.

‘You're tired, Helen dear,’ he says at last, as Lady Kirkpatrick shivers visibly and draws her furred wrap closer round her ; ‘and it's getting cold, too.’

‘Horribly cold!’ mutters Helen sadly.

‘I wish I had tried to get you a cup of tea when we stopped so long at that last

junction, instead of prosing on about my own affairs as I've done for the last hour. And you've been such a kind and patient listener, too !' adds Sir Horace quite gratefully, suddenly realising that it is not always very amusing for one pretty woman to listen to endless praises sung of another.

'*Very* patient!' and an odd, mocking sarcasm creeps into Lady Kirkpatrick's voice. 'But there's an end to all things,' she begins passionately, then stays the words abruptly.

Sir Horace turns and looks at her curiously. For the first time the true state of the situation dawns upon him. But greatly as he can enjoy a cousinly flirtation with the beautiful Helen, to go through any repetition of the tragic scenes of old, because that misguided person still

cherishes an unrequited attachment for his unworthy self, is an ordeal which he feels very loth to encounter. So he takes his cigarette from his lips, slowly knocks its ashes off against the window-frame, and says calmly :

‘My dear cousin, your statement is quite undeniable, for there is *very much* an end to all things,—especially to the follies of one’s youth! But to what particular “end” do you refer?’

‘To the end of my journey, of course!’ answers Lady Kirkpatrick with a bright proud smile, that makes Sir Horace feel strangely humbled. ‘This is my station, don’t you see, and there is Lord X——’s omnibus waiting for me and my numerous toilettes. Wise man! to send his largest carriage! Good-bye, *mon cousin*, or rather

au revoir, for I suppose we shall meet at the races to-morrow,—or is racing also reckoned in the category of forbidden sins for the future?’

Sir Horace hates being chaffed. His irritable temper makes him peculiarly sensitive to ridicule, and to pose as a saint is a position little suited to his tastes.

‘You shall repent of that little sarcasm, my Lady!’ he mutters to himself angrily, while assisting his companion out of the carriage, and aiding her to collect her multitudinous wraps, with his most *empressée* manner. But he felt annoyed, nevertheless, when the train moved on and he found himself quite alone to ponder upon the subject at his leisure; for an unpleasant suspicion crossed his mind that

in the eyes of this brilliant far-seeing woman of the world, he was scarcely the hero that he had altogether pictured himself.

CHAPTER XI.

A DREAM OF THE ST. LEGER.

' There's a lull in the tumult on yonder hill,
And the clamour has grown less loud,
Though the Babel of tongues is never still,
With the presence of such a crowd.
And the course is seen, with its emerald sheen,
By the bright spring-tide renew'd,
Like a ribbon of green, stretched out between
The ranks of the multitude.

' The flag is lowered. "They're off!" "They come!"
The squadron is sweeping on ;
A sway in the crowd—a murmuring hum !
"They're here !" "They're past !" "They're gone !" •
They came with the rush of the southern surf,
On the bar of the storm-girt bay ;
And like muffled drums on the sounding turf
Their hoof-strokes echo away.'

LINDSAY GORDON.

CHAPTER XI.

VERY crowded was the Yorkshire Stand this particular Doncaster week, and never had it numbered prettier faces or prettier 'frocks' than on the Leger day,—but by common consent the palm of beauty in both instances was awarded to the group now seated in Lord X——'s box. A regally handsome fair woman,—the magic of whose smile could enthrall the wildest Celtic hearts, and turn their thoughts for a moment even from Fenianism, from murder, and from sudden death,—made a most picturesque contrast to the dark-

eyed, raven-haired, Spanish Marquesa who sat beside her, clad in a costume of mingled darkest brown and rich old gold, that would have driven any aspiring 'Titian' mad with envy and despair. Opposite to both these ladies sat a remarkably pretty young *débutante*, whose violet eyes and delicate colouring were aptly framed in a simple white dress and bonnet of 'Marguerites,' a bright little English face full of life and spirits, strangely in contrast with that of the person to whom she was now speaking—Lady Kirkpatrick.

And yet, amongst all the beautiful women, there was none to compare with her! Quietly dressed in pearl gray,—with no ornaments to enhance her brilliancy of beauty,—she stood out from all others, in truth a 'bright particular star.'

There was a shade of melancholy on the beautiful face too, which lent unto it the softness generally wanting there; and perhaps never in all her life had Helen Kirkpatrick seemed so marvellously fascinating to the eyes of her quondam lover,—the lover who ‘had loved and had ridden away,’—as now.

With the accurate eye of one accustomed to fashionable throngs, has he scanned the brilliant assembly gathered there,—noting each pretty face, every graceful figure, any toilette worthy of interest. But, look where he will, he can see no woman like unto *her*.

‘Good morning, Helen!’ and in his secret heart he almost hoped to see the colour come to her cheek at his sudden address, as it had done so flatteringly the

day before. But he counted without fathoming the depths of a woman's heart.

Long before his slower gaze had yet made out in which particular part of the Stand his cousin was to be found, her lightning glance had seen him, had noted the colour of his coat, even the very flower in his button-hole ; and now she was amply prepared to give him a condescending little shake of the hand, suitable to a relation with whom she was on easy but rather uninteresting terms.

‘No, I am not at all tired, thank you. The journey yesterday passed delightfully quick, thanks to your entertaining conversation, *mon cher cousin !*’

The words were flattering enough, but the tone made him feel as if he had fallen

into a far more conventional place in her estimation than 'yesterday; and could it be possible that there was a suspicious ring of sarcasm in the sweet clear voice which was one of Helen's greatest charms?

Sir Horace had a strange mixture of conceit and sensitiveness in his disposition, which on the one hand made him tolerably impervious to ridicule, and on the other gave him a great dread of the same; moreover the mistake which he had made the day before, in praising one pretty woman to another, still rankled in his mind as an error very unworthy of so distinguished a connoisseur of the fair sex, and therefore he replied quite humbly :

‘The pleasure was all on my side, for you must have been extremely bored, I fear, with the endless rhapsodies and re-

solutions which I poured into your ear, hour after hour !’

‘Bored ? No, that is not at all a right view of my state of mind, I assure you,’ and Helen laughed low in unnoted sarcasm. ‘But you must tell me some more about it all, Horace, will you ? Later on in the afternoon, I mean, when the bustle of luncheon is over, and one can move about in peace.’

‘Very well,’ assented her cousin rather wonderingly. This interest taken in his new love by his old somewhat perplexed him. ‘As you know, I’m not a very keen sportsman where racing is concerned, and have not the faintest intention of elbowing my way through all the noisy “unwashed” below, just to imagine I’ve seen the horses in the paddock. So I’ll come and fetch

you directly after lunch, and we'll go up to the top of the Stand very early, and secure a good place for seeing the great race of the day.'

Accordingly, an hour later might be seen a couple leaning over the balustrade of the Stand, in a quiet corner, plunged in more earnest converse than seemed in keeping with their surroundings.

'So her name is Elsie Græme,' observed Lady Kirkpatrick, 'and she is a north-country lassie from the wild borderland, brought up in a ruined old fortress, and——a lady.' (A slight hesitation before the last two words caused her hearer to wince.) 'Have you thoroughly counted the cost, Horace?'

'I don't understand you,' answered Sir Horace coldly.

‘Do you feel disposed to face the many comments which will be made upon your romantic idyl, by those merciless Fates “the world, the flesh, and the devil?” Do you think that a woman dragged out of her sphere is always a happy woman? Lastly, does her husband always feel a happy man?’

‘Good God! how mean, how cowardly I am becoming!’ thought Helen to herself, bitterly. ‘There have been times when I felt as if I could break half the commandments without a single pang, but I never sank *so* low as to try and steal what is another’s!’

Sir Horace Stuart answered quietly and gravely :

‘Helen, if you were tired of doing nothing, tired of vain efforts to do right,

tired even of successful efforts to do wrong, wouldn't you too long for some sort of rest?'

'Ay!' and a world of meaning was crowded into that one short word.

'Well, that is my case, as I told you yesterday. Perhaps I am a bit of a fatalist, but, though at my age I'm not by any means blind to the folly of committing a possibly romantic mistake, I am heart and soul convinced that my one chance for this world and for the next (if there *be* another) would be to marry a woman of stronger character than myself, and on whose love and truth I could depend now and for ever.'

'And this is the only woman you have ever seen who could satisfy you in this?' asked Helen Kirkpatrick quietly, but a keen observer might have noted a marvel-

lous depth of misery in the sorrowful dark eyes which were apparently scanning the crowd below so carelessly.

‘The only one. I have met many who were very dear to me,—do you remember that summer of long ago, Helen? (Ah! see, you have broken your fan, closing it so hastily!) But you have realised as well as I, probably even more than I, how vague and unsatisfying are the early passions of one’s youth, *n’est ce pas, ma belle?*’ and Sir Horace smiled as he took his revenge for yesterday’s taunt concerning his startling reformation.

But something in Helen Kirkpatrick’s face drove the laughter from his lips, and he felt almost as if arraigned before his judge, when he met the sad accusing look of her quiet eyes, as she said :

‘I won’t pretend to misunderstand you, Horace. Yes, I married for money, to save my father, to save myself, and what did I gain? The curses of that father as he lay on his death-bed, maddened with drink, and the curses of my husband, because he hated me as only men hate those women whose hearts they can neither gain nor break. But it does not lie *there*, my lost youth! Its grave was dug long ere that!’

‘When and where was it buried?’ and Sir Horace’s voice grows dangerously tender, as tender as in those treacherous days of old.

But Helen’s proud calm eyes meet his unflinchingly as she answers low :

‘The grass has grown over it now. Let it rest in peace.’

Sir Horace was silent. To do him justice, he had never dreamt but what the romance of their early days had been as mere an episode in her life as it had been in his own, or nearly so. 'Women like to treasure up these things and feel sentimental over them,' he had told himself, with a little contemptuous shrug of the shoulders at their folly; 'but of course a girl brought up as Helen was, would be sure to know better, and so there was no necessity to cry over spilt milk.'

But now that he was brought face to face with the past, looking out at him from the depths of a woman's eyes, he felt startled at its intensity and power, and realised how little he had gauged its strength. And he too, was *he* so utterly unmoved by this glimpse into a past, of

which the memory was still so intoxicatingly sweet? Was any woman ever so beautiful as this one standing before him with averted head to conceal the tear which he felt no doubt was coursing down her cheek,—a tear shed for his sake?

A quiet resolute face is suddenly turned to him with no trace of tears in the bright mocking eyes, as Lady Kirkpatrick laughingly says:

‘Do you know, I was very near beginning to grow sentimental, Horace? That is the result of being taken up to high altitudes immediately after luncheon!’

But the cat cannot let the mouse escape. One more pat or two from claws sheathed in velvet can surely do no harm, and the unspoken defiance of her haughty pale face is very aggravating to his *amour propre*.

‘Helen, dear, I want you to——’

‘Awfully sorry to interrupt you, old fellow, but I’ve only just fought my way up here through the crowd, and *can* you tell me whether the horses have all gone down yet?’

‘No, I can’t,’ returns Sir Horace pettishly.

‘Our mutual cousin is not an enthusiastic sportsman, Charlie,’ puts in Lady Kirkpatrick, shaking hand with the newcomer, and smiling at him as only a woman can smile when she is most exasperated at an inopportune arrival.

‘Ah, that comes of his being brought up in foreign parts,’ says handsome Charlie Wroxton imperturbably. He is not accustomed to finding his society regarded as *de trop* by the fair sex in general, so fails to see that it is so now.’

‘Why you haven’t even marked your cards, either of you!’ he continues reproachfully, ‘and here are the horses actually going down to start.’

‘Well, that *was* a little forgetful, certainly,’ owns Lady Kirkpatrick with inward amusement, ‘especially as the quantity of chestnuts among them seems quite abnormal.’

‘There’s the winner of the Derby, Helen, if you don’t know him by sight! Dark blue and yellow cap are his colours.’

‘That’s the brute which upset astute calculations and ignorant guesses all alike,’ growled Sir Horace witheringly.

‘I expect *you* went for “Cadogan,” old chap?’ observed Mr. Charles Wroxton, with meaning.

‘As you *are* so flippantly forward with

your information to-day, my dear boy, perhaps you will tell me whether that long-legged animal now meandering down the course is a camelopard or a race-horse ?'

'That's the favourite!' exclaims young Wroxtton indignantly.

'Ah! that shows what a fine judge of thorough-bred stock I am! Now don't talk any more, there's a good child, but attend to your business. Helen, I hear you have become a mighty huntress since last we met ?'

'Yes,' answers Lady Kirkpatrick absently, with her race-glasses up to her eyes, and the latter steadily riveted upon a group of horses and gay colours which revolve round the starter and the starting-post at some little distance from the stand.

‘Don’t pretend to be so keenly interested in those confounded horses, Helen, for I want to talk to you if we could only get rid of this cursed boy!’ Sir Horace is fast losing his suavity.

‘They’re off!’ exclaims the cursed one with wild excitement, and nearly precipitating Sir Horace bodily down below, as he struggles for a better view. ‘Let me rest my elbow on your shoulder, my dear fellow, to get my glasses steady. There, now, I can see capitally!’

‘And I’m sure I can feel!’ murmurs his cousin savagely.

‘Now they’re getting to the top of that rise in the course,—watch them, Helen, they’ll come along like the devil when once they’ve passed that little red house over there, do you see? *Do* keep quiet,

Horace, you're shaking my glasses. There, I told you so! Look at the pace they're coming into the straight, and the favourite well to the front, too,—ah, I thought that fluky Derby winner would meet his match to-day. Hurrah, the Frenchman wins! "Rayon d'Or" wins!" shouts the excited young guardsman, as the well-known red and blue colours shoot to the fore, and the Leger is added to the triumphs of France, with many a length to spare.

'So the long-legged animal has won after all, has he?' observes Sir Horace Stuart placidly. 'Well, I don't pretend to be a judge or a racing prophet, so I'll forgive him this time. Take my arm, Helen, and let's go with the stream, else we shall never get down stairs. What were you

thinking of whilst that race was being run, *ma chère*?—Not of the horses, I'll swear!

‘Why?’

‘Because,—though you are no doubt a most excellent sportswoman, and in time may even develop into a most ardent gambler,—I know that you had not so much as a solitary half-crown upon the race, and moreover I very much doubt that you know even now what horse won it!’

‘Yes, I do,’ replies Lady Kirkpatrick hastily. ‘It was the Derby winner, wasn’t it?’ she adds, looking hastily and surreptitiously at her race-card, with a vague recollection that a dark blue colour mixed with some other had passed before her un-seeing eyes.

‘Exactly. Never tell stories, Helen,—

they are often dangerous, and, what is worse, generally futile. I ask you again ; of what were you thinking just now ?'

'Of you.'

Sir Horace has fully expected this, and strokes his small 'Henri quatre' beard to conceal a smile at her frankness, as he continues :

'But that is worse than no answer at all, for now I must of course know whether my right ear or my left ought to tingle in response to your inwardly spoken thoughts?'

'You mean,—was I thinking good of you, or bad? Well, neither. I was thinking whether I liked you well enough to do you a kindness, or hated you sufficiently to do you an unkindness!' and again the mocking expression in Helen's beautiful

unfathomable eyes disturbs his serenity somewhat unpleasantly.

‘I haven’t time to ask what you mean,’ he whispers hurriedly, ‘for here we are close to your party again. But you’ll tell me to-morrow, won’t you?’

‘I shall not be here to-morrow. But don’t speak about this now, for I have not told them yet that I must leave early to-morrow morning,’ and she nods her head towards the occupants of the box now close before them.

Sir Horace says no more, but a feeling of disappointment steals over him as he realises how much he will miss his cousin’s society on the morrow. ‘And too late in the week to start another attachment!’ he murmurs to himself disconsolately.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE FACE OF TRIAL.

‘Is there within thy heart a need
That mine cannot fulfil?
One chord that any other hand
Could better wake or still?
Speak now—lest at some future day my whole life wither
and decay.

‘Lives there within thy nature hid
The demon-spirit Change,
Shedding a passing glory still
On all things new and strange?—
It may not be thy fault alone—but shield my heart against
thy own.

‘Couldst thou withdraw thy hand one day
And answer to my claim,
That Fate, and that to-day’s mistake,
Not thou—had been to blame?
Some soothe their conscience thus: but thou, wilt surely
warn and save me now.’

A Woman’s Question.

CHAPTER XII.

‘MAY I speak to you? I have come a very long way to do so,’ and the clear haughty voice of the speaker gave a slight tremble, instantly suppressed.

Elsie Græme rose from her seat, paint-brush in hand, and advanced wonderingly to the doorway in which the stranger stood hesitating, and said heartily :

‘For sure! You’re very welcome to Dead Man’s Folly, and indeed it’s few visitors we ever have in these solitudes, so a stranger is doubly welcome.’

‘Thank you. But I am not sure that

you will feel so friendly towards me half an hour hence,' was the chilling reply.

Elsie stared at the speaker in mute amazement. The marvellous beauty of the latter, and her rich though simple dress, seemed to negative the assumption that she was merely an ordinary tourist who had missed her way, and her own words precluded any idea of this rencontre being accidental.

'I tell you, I have travelled here to see you and you alone,' went on the stranger in the same cold, mechanical voice, telling of some deep undercurrent of feeling strongly repressed. 'But come out into the open air, I am stifling!' she added, in tones that struck her hearer as strangely like those of some wild animal in dire pain.

With true courtesy Elsie Græme said gently :

‘Maybe you would like to see our prettiest bit of scenery here,—we will walk to look at the Force, I think,—it’s no a great way off?’

‘Yes, anywhere,’ answered her companion in feverish haste. ‘Just let me untie the innkeeper’s pony which I rode here on, for I must be gone again before many minutes are past,—it’s a weary long ride from the village below!’

Great as was Elsie’s curiosity regarding this strange visitor and her desire to know from whence she came, she was too innately well-bred to betray this feeling; and so contented herself with assisting her companion to untie a rough mountain pony that was fastened to a ring in the

wall, close beside the postern door, and then to lead the way towards the crest of hill crowned with pine-trees, from which descended the mass of turbulent water known as Carra Force.

Tying the pony's bridle to a convenient tree-stump, Elsie led her companion up a flight of rough steps leading to a moss-covered plateau above, from whence could be seen the fair land of Scotland, as well as many hundred miles of English soil, with the broad silvery streak of the Solway Firth lying between.

'There!' she said, turning proudly to the stranger, the bright light of enthusiasm shining in her clear grey eyes, 'you say you have travelled far, did you ever see a fairer land than that?'

But no reply came from her companion's

lips, no sympathy or admiration could be read in her weary dark eyes,—only she stared blankly before her as one who seeing sees not, and struggled vainly to say her say.

Suddenly, turning towards Elsie she said with abruptness :

‘I am Lady Kirkpatrick,—*now* can you guess why I have come ?’

But Elsie’s look of bewilderment was sufficient answer that she heard the name for the first time, and Helen thought to herself, ‘so he has not betrayed my old folly after all !’

‘Further still, I am Sir Horace Stuart’s cousin, his only near relation in fact,—and it is on his account that I have come here now.’

‘He’s not ill, or in pain ?’ exclaimed

Elsie, turning ashy white, and clasping the other's arm with a desperate clench.

'Not in the least!' laughed Helen sarcastically, shaking off Elsie's hand as if it were a hot burning coal that scorched her.

'Then I can have no cause to fear,' answered Elsie Græme, with quiet dignity.

'No! it is not for *you* I fear, it's for him.'

'And for why?'

'You are going to marry him, I know,—he told me all,—but have you thought of what you are doing?'

The bright colour flooded Elsie's fair face with sudden crimson, but never a word spake she.

'Listen to me, girl,' went on Lady Kirkpatrick haughtily, 'and you will soon see what a dire mistake you are about to make.'

‘Say on,’ replied Elsie calmly, all the proud blood of the Græmes rising in her heart, and a look of deep determination settling down on her bright sweet face.

‘I know that your family is as old as these hills around us,’ continued Lady Kirkpatrick soothingly, ‘but for all that you are no fit match for Sir Horace Stuart. Where is the man or woman in the world that will not scout this marriage as a *més-alliance*, the sequel to a man’s folly? And will it *not* be so? What thoughts and feelings can a man who has lived *his* life have in common with a girl who has lived *yours*?’

‘Love,’ said Elsie simply.

‘Bah! child, don’t talk such old-world rubbish! That alone shows me how little

you know Horace Stuart. Cannot you realise that when a man is satiated with the love of many women, bad and good, his tired fancy may rest for a time on some wild wayside flower that attracts him from its very dissimilarity to all those which he has plucked before, until he longs to possess it,—but of what avail? Ere a year were out, he would tire of its sweet freshness and long for the subtle intoxicating perfume of the exotics which he had loved so long,—and then the end would come!’

‘Did *he* bid you come and say this to me?’ asked Elsie fiercely.

‘No.’

‘Then *why* have you come to try and wreck my peace?’ said the girl pathetically.

‘For *his* sake,’ answered Lady Kirkpatrick steadily.

‘That may not be. Ye have no thought or care for the ruin of my heart, are ye sure that ye have any for the ruin of his, or is it yer ain ye are thinking of?’ and Elsie laughed aloud in bitter scorn.

But the intense sadness in the eyes that met her own caused the laugh to die away on her lips, as Helen said :

‘Yes, I loved him once as truly and deeply as you do, and he might have married me had he liked, but,—he went away and *forgot*.’

A world of bitter pathos lay in Helen’s wonderful voice, and in spite of herself Elsie wavered.

‘And you think he’ll forget me too?’

‘I do.’

‘So be it,’ said Elsie Græme, a ray of sunlight shining through the branches and lighting up her head with a sort of golden glory, as she stood erect and faced her antagonist proudly and calmly. ‘If it is all as you say, Leddy Kirkpatrick, if he marries me for the pastime of an hour, and forgets me when my hour is by,—the sorrow will be mine alone, the pleasure will be his. Therefore, why should *I* hesitate?’

The brave unselfishness of Elsie’s character looked out from her clear frank eyes, and Helen’s shrank before them as a dark shadow flies before the sun.

‘Because you will ruin the life of the man you profess to love.’

‘*Profess!*’ echoed Elsie bitterly.

‘Ay, profess; I repeat it! You have not lived in the world, *his* world, as I have,

child,—you cannot judge of the cruel weight of the iron chain which drags that man down who “marries beneath him!” What do you know of the perpetual harassing trial which such an ordeal is to his pride and self-command, the galling sore under which he daily winces? And to a proud, sensitive, irritable nature like Horace Stuart’s, it would bring madness and nothing less!’

There was a long and almost deathly silence; then Elsie spoke in a low constrained voice from which all sunshine seemed to have fled.

‘And ye think I would drag him down in this world, and so make it harder for him to gain the world to come,—ye think I should do him harm instead of good?’ Her own words spoken to her lover so

short a while ago seemed to rise up in judgment against her now, and the beseeching earnestness in her sweet true eyes again made Helen's heart fail her, but she nerved herself to say :

‘ I *do* think so.’

‘ Then listen, Leddy Kirkpatrick ! You must be sole witness of my prayer. Here, on the spot where I have so oft wandered with him, where my brightest days have all been spent,—I kneel down and make my vow !’

Helen hid her face in her hands with a low moan :

‘ Oh, God ! I *cannot* do it !’ and then glanced shudderingly at the sunlit form of Elsie Græme kneeling reverently there, with folded hands and uplifted eyes, like a child at prayer.

‘ I swear to part from him I love for

one long year, for his sake and his alone. If he love me truly and faithfully still, when that year is out, I *will* be his, and no man or woman shall come between us! But—if, ere the year is out, I am *forgotten*,—then I will go away and be no more seen,—and may God give me strength to keep this vow !’

Sad and solemn sounded Elsie’s words as the heathery breeze bore them away on its breath o’er moorland and o’er mountain, and there was that in her face as she rose from her knees that made Helen Kirkpatrick shrink from her with a strange feeling of fear and humiliation.

And yet it was to accomplish this very thing that she had travelled far and fast, had plotted and schemed,—and now it was done at last,—why could she not rejoice ?

‘You’ve had your say and you’ve done your deed,’ broke in Elsie Græme’s voice sternly. ‘Whether ye’ve acted from kindness alone and in all good faith, no one but yerself may say!’ But Helen answered never a word.

‘Still there was truth in your words, Leddy Kirkpatrick,’ continued the girl sadly, ‘such truth as your world and his might say, and I thank you for telling me of it, whatever your motive may have been. At least I shall owe it to yourself alone, if I have saved from pain and sorrow him whom I love more than life or death, and maybe you have come here as a blessing after all.’

‘No, no!’ and all the hidden grandeur of Helen’s wild nature sprang to the surface like some surging wave, carrying

all before it,—‘I have been untrue to you and to him, for God’s sake, forget all I have said and marry Horace,—it may be the saving of him!’

‘Too late, Leddy Kirkpatrick,’ answered Elsie Græme sadly. ‘Till you came here to-day, I had no thought save that my wedding Sir Horace Stuart *must* be for his good as well as for his pleasure. But you have sown doubt in my heart now, and the seed bears fruit.’

‘I spoke in haste and in anger,’ said Helen eagerly. ‘He is my only relation, and he is so much to me!’ her voice trembled with pain though her eyes looked unflinchingly into her companion’s. ‘Cannot you make allowance for this, and forgive my words?’

‘I forgive ye, but I cannot forget,’

replied Elsie steadily. 'The shadow of a sorrow which I might be the means of bringing on his life would stand betwixt him and me now, and loving him as I do how could I bear it?' asked the girl simply.

Helen was silent. The marvellous unselfishness of Elsie's beautiful character struck her dumb with surprise. What could the true pure love be like which this girl felt? What could the strength of feeling be that had power to renounce all happiness in life for sake of another? Helen's wayward passionate heart could no more comprehend the grandeur of Elsie's noble mind, than the latter could even guess at the overwhelming power of the passion which looked out from Helen's reckless, miserable eyes.

They formed a strange contrast, these two women, as they stood confronting one another there, each so striking in her own type of beauty. But the truth and purity which shone forth from the frank sweet face of Elsie Græme seemed doubly bright when compared to the gloomy yet pathetic recklessness of Helen's.

‘You are noble, and good, and true, Elsie Græme, and you will conquer in the end,’ said Helen in a sad prophetic tone. ‘But can you rely on your own strength not to break down and repent you of your resolution ere the year is out—can you keep to your word so long?’

‘Keep to my sworn and plighted word? You're a Southron!’ was the proud indignant reply, uttered in withering scorn.

‘Well, good-bye then. God knows when

we shall meet again,' and Helen Kirkpatrick felt strangely sad and humbled as she turned to go down the hill once more.

'Ay! He knows the when and how, I leave all to Him,' said Elsie's clear bright tones in answer from above.

CHAPTER XIII.

A LOST DREAM.

‘ Still the angel stars are shining,
Still the rippling waters flow,
But the angel-voice is silent
That I heard so long ago.
Hark ! the echoes murmur low,
Long ago !

‘ Still the wood is dim and lonely,
Still the plashing fountains play,
But the past and all its beauty,
Whither has it fled away ?
Hark ! the mournful echoes say,
Fled away !

* * * *

‘ Cease, oh echoes, mournful echoes !
Once I loved your voices well ;
Now my heart is sick and weary—
Days of old, a long farewell !
Hark ! the echoes sad and dreary
Cry farewell, farewell !’
Echoes.

CHAPTER XIII.

‘WHAT is it? What can it all mean?’ exclaimed Sir Horace Stuart to himself, when forty-eight hours later he stood before the postern door in the tower of Dead Man’s Folly, and hammered loudly and vainly on its oaken face in extreme perplexity of mind and body.

The heavy door swung back slowly and suddenly, and a weird-looking old crone appeared in the doorway, who croaked forth in solemn tones :

‘Hush! vex ye not the dead wi’ yon haverin’ and clammerin’!’

‘The *dead!*’ echoed Sir Horace with a sudden terrible fear that blanched his cheek and froze all the blood in his heart. ‘For God’s sake, who is it that’s dead? Speak, woman, quick!’

‘Baith, baith,’ murmured the old crone, rocking herself to and fro in monotonous grief. ‘They’re baith ganged awa’, the auld man and the young lassie,—the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken awa’, blessed be the name of the Lord!’

‘Hold your cursed gibberish, and tell me the sane truth!’ burst in Sir Horace savagely.

‘Weel, weel, ye need na’ to be so dour wi’ a puir auld body wha’s joost as fashed as yersel’ wi’ this awfu’ trouble. But step inside, an’ ye’ll know a’ then.’

Hastily and fearfully Horace Stuart entered the long old oaken room, whereon

the shadow of death had fallen, and at the farther end of which stood a coffin spread over with a simple black velvet pall, whereon some loving hand had laid a wreath of wild flowers.

‘Ay, ay, but he made a bonnie corpse, the puir auld mon!’ wept the old crone in profoundest sympathy.

‘But *she*,—Elsie,—where is she?’ broke from Sir Horace Stuart in maddened impatience.

‘That’s joost the warst of a’ I have to tell,’ answered the old woman, gloating over her tale of horrors. ‘The puir lassie was that distraught when she found her auld feyther lying dead at foot of the stone staircase yonder, that she joost took off and drooneded hersel’ afore any folks were about, early yester’ morn.’

‘*Drowned* herself! woman, you are raving! Elsie Græme commit suicide? no, that I’ll never believe!’

‘Ken ye hoo it was done?’ and the old hag peered curiously into Sir Horace’s ashen face. ‘Maybe ye’re her lover, puir lassie,’ she added in a softer tone.

‘She was to have been my wife next week,’ answered Horace Stuart shortly. ‘For God’s sake tell me all you know, and be quick about it!’

‘’Twas in Carra Force she did it,’ pursued the old woman sadly. ‘We all took note that she did na’ seem hersel’ the night afore, but wi’ so great a sorrow laid sudden on her puir young head, none o’ us thought it strange-like; na’, not even when auld Bella Wilson cam’ to help me lay out the master’s body, an’ we foond

her strecht on her knees afore it, and harrd her say: "Best so, best so; good-bye, beloved father," for she was greetin' like a bairn, as nat'ral and true as possible.'

'Well, then; what happened then?'

'It's na' use yer fashin' me, young mon, for it's hard to tell the tale o' the puir thing's end,—sae bright an' bonnie a lass too!' and the old woman's voice quavered miserably in genuine sorrow.

'You will understand I mean no harm,' Horace Stuart forced himself to utter soothingly.

'Na, na, I ken weel that it's nobbut yer way, puir mon,' responded the old dame, wiping her eyes and continuing her story. 'Weel, then, at early morn the lassie was nowhere to be found, tho' we searched here and there, and fashed and cried our

loudest for aye three 'oors. An' then a lyle laddie wha was tendin' sheep, cam' an' told us to go to the Force up yonder, for that a woman's hat an' 'kerchief lay on the bank, and he feared a mischance had befall her. An' there they lay for sure,—the very hat she's worn this mony a day, when ramblin' o'er the moontains sae blithe an' gay,—and the lyle 'kerchief with a blue border which I'd seen the puir lass dry her eyes with the very nicht afore !'

'But that does not prove she is drowned !' burst in Sir Horace eagerly.

'Mon, mon, had ye seen Carra Force yester' morn, ye'd know it all better nor I can tell it ye ! There was a flood o' brown seethin' waters roarin' down frae the moontains like a flood o' destruction,—sae bad a one has not been seen this mony a year.

I tell ye, anything that went in *there* must ha' reached the Solway Firth ere now.'

Horace Stuart shuddered and buried his face in his hands with a feeling of utter despair, from which he was only aroused by the sound of a man's footstep near him, and, looking up, he saw before him the well-remembered face of the old white-haired minister.

'Is it really true? Is there *no* hope?' he exclaimed, grasping the old man's hand mechanically.

'None,' was the reply, uttered in a tone of sad conviction.

'But it was so unlike her!' urged Sir Horace in painful eagerness. 'You know how brave and good she was; was *she* a woman to commit the crime of suicide?'

‘When the mind is unhinged by a sudden and most crushing sorrow, who can tell when the brain will overstep the bounds of reason? Sir Horace, I know that you were to marry Elsie Græme, and can assure you that we have left no stone unturned to discover what could have befallen the puir lassie! But one and all, we can come to but one conclusion. She *may* have lost her footing and fallen down the bank,—God grant it be so,—but the secret of her death lies too surely in the wild foaming waters of Carra Force—God rest her soul, puir bairn!’

‘Amen,’ said Sir Horace hoarsely, as he turned to leave the place which had brought to him the sweetest happiness and the blackest despair that he had ever yet known; and with a silent hand-clasp from

the sorrowful old minister, he passed away from it for ever.

But fast and hurried as were his footsteps, there was one sound which followed him with mocking persistence, and recalling to his mind the hour when he had defied all powers of earth and heaven to part him from the woman he loved,—for loud and clear on the mountain air rang out the wild vindictive voice of Carra Force.

* * * * *

‘The sun shines fair on Carlisle wall,’
as a pale weary woman makes her way hurriedly down a by-street of that city, and stops before a door upon the brass plate of which can be read the names of Messrs. Brown and Armstrong, Solicitors.

When the door opens she asks eagerly

for the senior partner of the firm, and in another minute is ushered into the latter's private business-room.

‘Miss Græme? This *is* a surprise!’ ejaculates a kindly grey-haired man of about sixty; rising from his chair to welcome her. But he stops hesitatingly at sight of the blanched face and trembling lips of his visitor, and adds hurriedly: ‘What is it, my dear? Nothing wrong with your father, I hope?’

‘No, thank God! He’s dead,’ says Elsie, in the dull, stupefied tone that tells of utter prostration of mind and body.

‘Bless my soul! dear, dear, how very sad!’ murmurs her auditor, doubtful how to take the girl’s words. ‘But how and when did it happen, and why—why——’

‘Why am I here, you would ask? Be-

cause I am never going home again,—because I want to go away from every one,—I *must* be alone!’ and Elsie Græme’s eyes burnt like living coals of fire, whilst her face turned even paler than before.

‘My dear child, I can’t understand all this! The first thing I shall do is to force you to drink this wine,’ and Mr. Brown poured out a glass hurriedly from the decanter on the sideboard behind him.

‘Thank you,’ said Elsie quietly, ‘I am tired out, I believe. I wished no one to know when and how I left Dead Man’s Folly this morning. So I stole out at day-break, but I could not cross the river, it was too swollen,—I nearly fell in, I think,—and so I had to walk many miles across the mountains ere I could reach the far-off station that I wanted. And then—then——’

a terrible burst of sobbing interrupted the girl's speech, for now that the necessity for actual physical exertion was past, all the desolation of her sorrow came upon her with redoubled force.

Gently and kindly, the old lawyer got the whole story from her at length, always excepting the mysterious reason why she wished to bury herself in some far-off spot for one whole year. But, though he had a shrewd suspicion that some tale of unprosperous love lay hidden there, for the sake of her dead father,—once his school-fellow in days gone by,—and from pity for the desolate girl herself, he determined to help her in all he could.

The fact of his being her father's sole executor, as both knew well, rendered the matter easier. And Elsie's grave and busi-

ness-like proposition: that he should advance her a certain sum of money to enable her to live until she had found some means by which to earn her daily bread, and take in exchange her father's pictures, furniture, and effects,—which would, of course, now be sold,—was instantly acceded to.

‘ But the difficulty is, where to find you a home in London, my dear; for whether you go out as companion or drawing-mistress, my reference will be of little use to you as regards vouching for your past experience in those matters, and it may be some time, you see, before you find anything to suit you. You must excuse my plain speaking, my dear, but I'm not going to let my old friend Græme's daughter rough it in the world more than I can help.’

‘You’re very good,’ said Elsie gratefully. ‘But I am not afraid.’

‘Of course not,—there’s nothing much to fear,—ahem!’

Poor Mr. Brown was at his wits’ end as to how much or how little to say to this resolute but inexperienced young person. At last a happy thought struck him.

‘I have a niece in London, Miss Græme, who lives in a quiet and respectable part of the town, and would, I am sure, take you in for two or three weeks. But I tell you frankly that she is an actress, and though as kind-hearted and honest a little body as ever lived,—over thirty, too, and no beauty,—still you may not like the idea?’

‘Oh, but I do,—very much!’ exclaimed Elsie eagerly. ‘That seemed worst of all,

having to live in a great town like London all alone. It would change everything, if only I knew I should find even *one* kind face there !'

'Well, well, Miss Græme, I'm sure you can count upon that so long as my niece Bell is there. And she's a brisk, energetic little body too, accustomed to business matters, and to fight for herself,—and I really think you could be in no safer hands, my dear. I should be glad to think you were with her.'

So everything was speedily arranged and settled, and Elsie Græme looked her last at 'merrie Carlisle' and the old Cumberland mountains for many a long year.

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